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*Sonora Sketch Book*



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# *Sonora* *, Sketch Book*

*by* JOHN W. HILTON



1947 THE MACMILLAN COMPANY NEW YORK

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*First printing.*

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

## *Dedication*

*I*N a little "campo santo" in the Mexican Hills, surrounded by Sonorans who called him "Don Jeem," lie the mortal remains of my friend JIM McCARTHY, prospector—adventurer—philosopher.

To the memory of his fine character and ideals of international friendship, I humbly dedicate this book.

1226439

MAR 26 1947



## *Preface*

A SKETCH is a great deal more than a few essential lines drawn on a piece of paper. Just as the hastily jotted notes of a speaker would mean little to the casual reader, a sketch by itself has small significance to any one but the artist who made it. If the sketcher is truly interested, all of his senses are keyed to their highest pitch and concentrated on one focal point. Such complete absorption, along with the act of drawing, serves to profoundly impress on his memory a great deal more than the form and color of the scene. When I look at an old sketch, details of color and mass not represented on the paper flash before me. Things I thought I had forgotten become very real. I re-experience the quality of the sunlight, the feel of the air, sounds and movements—yes, and even the smells of the moment.

One evening beside my studio fireplace, I sat wishing I could travel again the pleasant trails of Sonora. I unearthed the old sketch-pads—veterans of several Sonora sojourns over a period of eight years—and as I leafed through their familiar pages, pictures came to life again of places and things and people. While enjoying in retrospect these pleasures and mild adventures, I resolved to write this book.

This is not a book on Mexico nor even an exhaustive study of Sonora. It is rather an experiment in sharing these memories. There is no attempt to produce timely or “significant” literature. The problems of the land are, in my opinion, the personal property of its people. If there is any purpose, beyond the realm of entertainment, in presenting these verbal and pictorial sketches, it is to bring the reader to a better understanding and appreciation of a land and a people that I have learned to love and admire.





## *Acknowledgments*

A BOOK of this sort can never be truly considered a "one-man product." I am indebted to a great many people for both original material and technical assistance; especially to my brother-in-law, Orville Hollinger of El Monte, California, for proofreading of this manuscript, and to his wife, Helen, for the final typing. To Floyd B. Evans of Pasadena and Harlow Jones of Twenty-nine Palms I owe technical advice and help in the photographic reproductions of my sketches.

I am deeply indebted to my friends, Grace and Ted Gosser of Los Angeles, not only for their help and interest in our trips to Sonora but for the fact that they saved all of my letters containing "on-the-spot impressions." These letters were invaluable in reconstructing some of the happenings and places.

It would consume too much space to list all of the people of Sonora who furnished tales and data for these stories, even if I knew all of their names, but without them this book would never have been possible.

Americans living in Mexico, who made us members of their households, are also responsible in no small degree for the writing of this book. I am especially grateful for the hospitality of the McCarthy family who lived at Guirocoba, Mr. and Mrs. Fred Dow, Sr., and Mr. Kibby in Ciudad Obregón. Many of my native Sonoran hosts are described at length in the text of the book.

To Howard Scott Gentry, who talked me into going on my first trip to Sonora, I owe a great deal more than the writing of a book. His enthusiasm and early guidance opened for me a doorway to a wholly new field of pleasant experiences. Such things cannot be appraised by ordinary standards of value.

Finally, I am indebted to the dozens of friends, neighbors, and relatives who believed all along in my ability to finish this book, even when my own belief faltered.

JOHN W. HILTON

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*Sonora Sketch Book*



## *Triumphal Entry to Hermosillo*

THE sketch of one of the cathedrals of Hermosillo brings to mind the first time that I saw it, when we arrived under the light of a brilliant Sonora moon.

We were traveling with Howard Gentry and his wife, and it was our first trip to Mexico. Just at that time there had been a shake-up among the border officials, and they were all on their toes to make it as tough as possible. Every box and bag had to be examined and listed, and the various papers for us to sign were seemingly never-ending. Finally, with a deep sigh of relief, the last paper was signed, our bags were sealed, and we were off to the south, only to be stopped and inspected again about a mile out of town, and again about twenty miles beyond. We shuddered each time we sighted a uniform (which might mean another delay), as we did so much want to spend the night in Hermosillo.

The road was still pretty bad in those days, and darkness overtook us long before we reached our destination. We were traveling along at thirty miles an hour, which was a record for the day, when what should I see in the road ahead but some more Mexican uniforms. We held our breath as we came to a stop, and prayed silently that we would not have to unpack again here in the dark at this hour of the night. Our relief when the leader of the group announced that he was out of gas can well be imagined. It was still eight leagues on to Hermosillo. We checked our gas and found that we did not have enough to get both cars that far. They suggested that we carry one of their group on into town to get help. We countered with the suggestion that we push the car with all its occupants into town. They seemed overwhelmed by our generos-

ity; so touched, in fact, that they reached in the back seat and produced a bottle of tequila which they insisted on sharing.

While the tequila was getting the proper attention we discovered that the chief of police of Hermosillo and a couple of officers in the Mexican army were in the lot. It looked as if our luck had changed. When the "Jefe" found out who we were and what we were doing he insisted that on the morrow he would write a letter that would spare us further annoyance in the matter of inspections.

The road was fairly good, with a general down grade. We managed to make almost as good time pushing the other car as we had been doing alone. We had traveled this way about two miles when there was a sudden loud honking of the horn and waving of hands from the front car, and we wondered what new calamity had befallen. We stopped short only to discover that they had found another bottle of tequila in the back seat and felt that we should help them with it.

As we stood there on the narrow strip of roadway with the great silent Sonora desert crowding in on all sides, there suddenly appeared an orange glow in the east, and the fiery ball of a full moon seemed to lurch up through the heat waves above the distant Sierras. Suddenly the desert came alive with weird shadows of strange cactus forms and gnarled trees with satiny trunks that shone silver-gray in the moonlight. I noticed that one of these trees near the road seemed to be in bloom, although there were no leaves on it. I stepped over and picked a branch and found that it was covered with small, snow-white, morning-glory shaped flowers that seemed to emit an almost phosphorescent glow. The officers told us it was called "palo santo." We could readily understand why such a plant would be known as the sacred tree.

We were soon rolling merrily on again and, with only two more stops for liquid refreshments, we managed to arrive in the edge of Hermosillo. We stopped at the nearest gas station, and the driver went to awaken the owner, while we questioned the chief about the town and a good hotel for the night. He promised to have us directed to the very best, and we began to wonder what the price would be, since he emphasized that there was "no mejor." It might be just a little "ritzy" for a couple of fellows and their



wives who had figured down to the last cent what it was going to cost them to stay a summer in Sonora.

Presently the owner of the station came and unlocked. While he was filling the gas tanks our friend, the Jefe, was busy on the phone in rapid-fire Spanish. In a few minutes we heard the sound of sirens, and wondered where the fire might be. Then lights of two motorcycles rounded a corner and came to a stop right in front of the gas station. The Jefe informed us that this was our escort; that they would lead us to the hotel. Who were we to refuse such a gesture? After our adios, felicidades, etc. were properly said (we hoped), the motors took the lead and we followed through the brilliantly moonlit streets of the capital of Sonora. Every little while, one or both of our escorts opened up his siren for the benefit of some group on a street corner, so they would look up and know that here were friends of the chief of police visiting Hermosillo. The fact that at least ninety percent of the town must have been fast asleep in no way deterred them from blessing each block with banshee wails. I think they were the loudest sirens I ever heard, or possibly it was the way they echoed from the fortresslike buildings that faced the almost deserted streets.

The ride continued for some time, turning this way and that, until I couldn't have drawn even a reasonable map of the route. Then we passed a statue that I vaguely remembered seeing from another angle, and I realized that the officers either were showing us the entire town by moonlight or were just enjoying the chance for a good long ride. As we hadn't the slightest idea where we were by then, there was nothing for us to do but to go along blindly until, with a last gasping wail, they stopped in front of a hotel.

The alacrity with which boys came out to get our things, and showed us where to park the truck, indicated word had gone ahead that important visitors were expected. The Lord knows there had been plenty of time for the service-station man to have walked to the hotel and informed them! I suspect however that it was the Jefe and his telephone again, for the desk clerk had a couple of fine corner rooms picked out and everything ready for us to sign. This we did, still wondering about the price, but deciding that this first night in Mexico might just as well be a gala one, since it had

started out so well; and anyway there was the tequila which we had consumed en route. I have found that this drink has a wonderful way of soothing apprehensions.

Our room was spacious to the point of embarrassment. Eunice said she would feel as if she were sleeping in the waiting room of the Grand Central Depot. There was a dresser of ancient vintage, but well preserved, on which stood a pitcher of water and a wash-bowl, both decorated with bright red roses which matched those on the wallpaper. At the other end of the room stood a huge four-poster bed enveloped in an intricate canopy of mosquito netting. Peeping out coyly from beneath the spread was a crockery chamber pot which matched the pitcher and bowl, even to the red roses. We were in luxurious surroundings indeed. I turned out the single unshaded light-bulb that hung suspended from the ceiling on at least ten feet of cord, and we settled down for a comfortable night's rest. The bed was really good. Many another night in a Mexican hotel we were to think back to this moment and wish fervently for a bed or a room even half as good.

We were tired enough, but somehow sleep just would not come. I have heard many travelers complain of the noises in strange towns and villages where they have tried to sleep, and have wondered if they really were so much more noisy than the travelers' home town, or whether the noises were just new to the ears and therefore exaggerated in importance.

We lay there listening to the sounds of the city. Barking of dogs formed a sort of background for a good many other sounds, mostly not unpleasant; but the thing that we particularly noticed, when we stepped to the huge windows (that came almost down to the floor) and listened carefully, was that we could count at least a dozen different groups of street musicians, either serenading someone or just singing and playing for the plain fun of it. We finally dropped off to slumber, and I dreamed of long rows of palo santo trees, between which I was speeding on a motorcycle with red light and wide-open siren. It could have been the tequila.

The bill was a pleasant surprise the next morning, as was the breakfast of our first papaya, fried eggs, and coffee. We tried to locate the Jefe, but he was away till four P.M., and we couldn't wait.

## *Guaymas Memories*

THE first time that I saw Guaymas was on the fourth of May. We had battled bad roads and dust across the thornbrush-and-cactus studded desert from Hermosillo south, and, much as I like deserts, the water was a welcome sight. The sun was low. Just as we were shown to our rooms, facing the bay in the old Gran Hotel Almada, it was reflected in purple counterpoints on the iridescent water. There was nothing between our second-story room and the water but a wide sidewalk, edged by a concrete sea wall, and as we looked down we could see myriads of small fish swimming busily about; our first taste of the teeming life that characterizes the Gulf of California.

Any town has some building or person, or perhaps a combination of both, to serve as a typical reminder of that locality. To me, such a spot is the Gran Hotel Almada. Perhaps there are other hotels in town equally interesting; and I am sure that the Playa del Cortez out on Miramar Bay is considerably more modern and palatial; but we got started with the Almada, and that seems to be the spot to which we always return when coming to Guaymas. There, in its spacious patio, where one can drive his car for safety, and sign the register without getting out, I have had many pleasant experiences and conversations. In the old bar, where the sea captains used to congregate, one can always find entertaining persons and cool drinks to share with them.

The church bells bothered me that first night. They seemed to be right in the room and struck the hour, "mas o menos," with a persistence that was appalling. I would just get soundly to sleep when the sudden clanging would almost raise me out of bed, and it

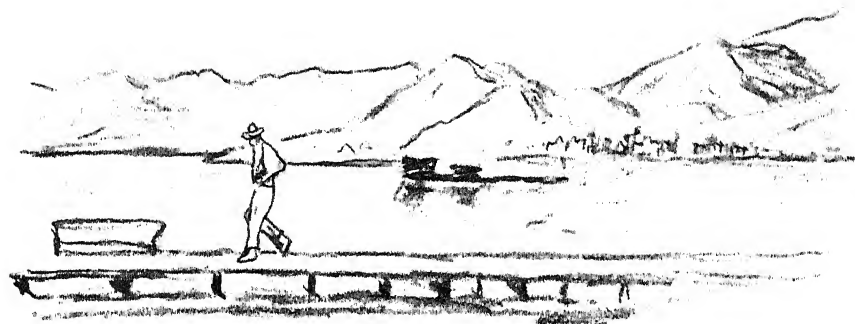
seemed that it was only a few minutes until the whole process was repeated again. Noises are funny. After several nights in Guaymas, if someone had asked me whether I heard the same church bells in the night, I would probably have answered, "What church bells?"

The first thing we heard in the morning was the laughter of children, right under our window. They seemed to be having a hilarious time for themselves, and I finally got up and looked out on the sidewalk below. The sea wall was draped with clothing of all sorts and in every state of deterioration. Right out in front were dozens of newsboys and bootblacks, taking their morning dip in the bay, without benefit of bathing suits. They were amusing to watch. The joy of living seemed to radiate from every pore of their brown skins. Soon they put on their clothes and gathered up their shine boxes, or bundles of papers, and went off to their daily grinds.

Passers-by of both sexes seemed to think nothing of the boys' nudity, and called to them from the sidewalk banteringly, as they went about their early morning walks or shopping tours.

One other time we had a room facing the land instead of the sea, and every morning we watched a strangely beautiful spectacle. Just as the rising sun turned the naturally red cliffs to an incandescent rose, the goatherds started up the mountain; apparently the goats were retained in corrals of some sort at the base of the hills, but grazed on the mesas above. The trail was composed of dozens of switchbacks up the side of the almost vertical volcanic upthrust. Goats of many hues, and small boys shouting to one another and to their flocks, made a sinuous parade as they zigzagged up the cliff through the sunrise.

For breakfast we had papayas, toast, and black coffee, and it broke the cook's heart. She had prepared steak, chicken and beans. We assured her that we would be back for such a meal at noon, but she looked cheated though the price was the same (one peso each) regardless of what we ate. The waitress told us that a cook likes to see people eat, and when they turn something down the cooks feel that they have been personally insulted. We were about to go out in the kitchen and try to explain why the first course had been entirely sufficient, when a band took our minds off the whole matter.





Then we realized that today was "Cinco de mayo," and that this day was to the Mexican people what Fourth of July is to us. It was a parade; the first of the day—and only the beginning. Later, all the shops closed while they had parades of every school, police force, military unit, representatives of the navy, and fraternal and labor organizations—all bearing the Mexican flag with its tri-colors of red, white, and green, and the ancient symbol of the eagle perched on a cactus with a snake in its mouth. Each group had music of some sort, and the streets were gay, though dusty.

The dry season was at its height. Everything was like tinder. The air even felt dry for a spot so near the sea, and the very palms in the plaza drooped. The city water supply ran low at this time of the year, and none could be spared. Caged birds could be seen through patio doorways, spreading their brightly colored wings for added ventilation; flowers drooped, and there was dust on the gardenias.

In spite of all this we liked Guaymas. We liked it well enough to come back again and again. The town and the old hotel hold a lot of pleasant memories—stories I heard at the bar: of the fabulous Vermilion Sea (the Spaniards' first name for the gulf; tales of pearl divers from the Lower California ports, and their adventures in the deep; of the great manta rays that smothered and killed men; of giant octopi, capable of overturning a boat; of "burrow shells" that caught the feet of divers. The old-timers could sit by the hour and recite tales of everything from sea serpents to mermaids, and I am sure that they had told the stories so often that they believed them themselves.

They told me of Don Juan Ocio, who was a common soldier and a guard at the mission Loretto; how a great "chubasco"—which, as near as I could discover, is a sort of waterspout that sweeps in from the gulf and deposits marine life over the desert—came to Loretto. It seems that this particular storm was unusually violent, and it dropped tons of pearl oysters out on the dry land, where the Indians gathered them and had great feasts. They had no use for the pearls, and the story goes that Juan Ocio traded some old clothes and other trinkets for about ten gallons of the finest. He then quietly marketed a few, bought his way out of the army,

settled at La Paz, and became one of the wealthiest and most influential men of that period.

Then there was the tale of the king of the pearlers at La Paz; a little naked boy, who was found by the first Spaniards, playing on the beach with pearls as large as marbles. He was soon traded out of this treasure and, in the celebration that followed in the camp of the Spaniards, they decided to crown him king of the pearlers. They did, with much pomp and bogus ceremony. The little boy became a sort of mascot for the colony, and whenever a diver found an exceedingly fine gem, he was forced to pay tribute. They asked him what he wanted and he said, "Bring me some worms." These were a soft white grub, to be found by turning over rotten logs. Soon a regular measurement was agreed upon. Fellow divers would examine the pearl and pronounce it a "three-worm gem," or a ten, or a twenty; whereupon the lucky finder was forced to crawl about on his hands and knees and find the required tribute for the little black monarch. Of course, he was accompanied by his fellow divers, who did everything in their power to make him seem, if possible, even more ridiculous. The King grew up as all kings do, and finally died leaving an equally dark-skinned heir; but the new monarch had changed his tastes. Although the diver still had to go about on all fours in a mock wormhunt, he presented the despot with a gift of coins, beads, or sweetmeats; more to his liking.

Another tale that is retold with many variations is the tale of the Pearl without Shame. It starts with a woman who, though beautiful, was as shameless as the pearl that finally caused her downfall. When a lover asked for her favors she would say simply, "Bring me a pearl"; and if the pearl was large and fine enough, that man was very happy for a while, but the woman had no shame. She had one consuming desire: to own more and finer pearls, which she wore at all times. She amassed a great fortune in these lovely gems, all paid for in the same manner. Then a strange man came by. He was of noble descent, but poor. He too was smitten by the beauty of this lovely siren, and she said, "Bring me a pearl." He had no money, so he learned to dive, and eventually he found two very fine pearls. One was a lovely pink, but the other was a strange, changeable color, passing from gray to purple. It was a fascinating gem, but



the other divers refused even to touch it. They told the finder that he had better throw it into the sea, for it was "la perla sin vergüenza" (the pearl without shame), and it would spoil any pearls that touched it. The young man returned with the two pearls, which he had kept separated. He decided that, if the woman had remained true, he would give her the pink pearl of fabulous worth; but if she had been unfaithful, he would have her at the price of the beautiful, but shameless, pearl.

When he got back to Guaymas he found that she had married a Spaniard of great wealth, but was still willing to pay her usual price for a fine pearl. The young man hid his fine pink pearl, and called at the house when the wealthy husband was well away on a voyage. His revenge was complete. In a few days all the fine lady's pearls began to fade, and finally only the great gray-and-purple one shone with its sinister luster. The young man then circulated the story that the pearls had died of grief for the shamelessness of the wearer, and the lady, unable to bear the disgrace, finally threw herself into the bay. Her ghost, I am assured, can be heard wailing on stormy nights along the sea wall.

Yes, the old Hotel Almada has many a tale and memory about it; and, although the room service is unpredictable, and the plumbing dates back to nineteen hundred, I hope they never modernize it.

I stopped there the last time with some American friends, and we had the largest room in the place. The ceiling was so high, and the single electric light so dim, that we actually were disappointed when we looked up and didn't see stars. Our room was equipped with a bath that would have been big enough for a whole hotel suite in an American hostelry, and it too had a ceiling about twenty feet high, from which protruded a gadget that looked like a railroad whistle (which it may have been), but we were assured it was a shower head. A string was attached to a handle on this contraption and hung down to within a few inches of the zinc-covered floor. On the end of this string was a ring in which the bather was supposed to hook one toe and hold the throttle open, while the water came tumbling down from the heights and nearly knocked him flat.

We had made the rounds of the more interesting spots of Guay-

mas, in what had not been an entirely uneventful evening, and a shower of any sort sounded like a good idea. The hilarious time we all had, operating the plumbing, raised a racket that must have awakened every guest in the hotel, and in this country would have ended in a prompt ejection. But there, no one seemed to mind. When we finally had all had our baths, and settled down to sleep, the shower kept right on dripping. The spring, or whatever held the valve closed, had weakened, it seems. At any rate, the regular drip every twelve and a half seconds, hitting that zinc floor with a TAP—TAP—TAP, became very annoying. My friend Harlow Jones rolled over in his bed and propped himself up on one elbow. "We have to do something about that damned thing," he said, "it sounds like a W.P.A. worker pounding tacks." We tried everything—including stacking all the furniture in the room under it, so we could tie the lever back firmly—but it still dripped. Finally Max Felker, who is an inventor, turned over in bed. "If you guys will shut up," he promised, "I'll fix that so-and-so thing." Whereupon, he rose deliberately and took a towel from the rack, bundled it into a ball, and placed it directly under the drip. The noise stopped—and the rest of the hotel guests probably sighed a deep sigh of relief, for it was two A.M.

Yes, I like Guaymas. I like the fishing, and I like to just ride out in the blue bay and look back at the white town against great, red-lava hills, and see the little red islands, studded with giant cacti that grow right down to the shoreline. I like to watch the rookeries of great sea birds of all sorts that inhabit these little islands, and hear their strange cries as they rise and wheel overhead. One day I thought I had found an island covered with a new species of *Cephalocereus*. Cacti of this group are usually crowned by masses of white wool in the top where the flowers appear. Here, right in front of me, was a whole island covered with giant cereus plants, each topped with a white crown. The size alone would indicate a new species, as there are no described members of the genus so large, and nothing of the sort reported from this locality.

I am a cactus collector, and it looked as if I were about to make botanic history. I ordered the boatman to swing in close to the little island and, as we came nearer, it was apparent that I had made a

terrible mistake. The tip of each plant was simply the roost of some guano-depositing bird, and the white crowns would probably wash off with the summer rains, along with the dust of Guaymas. We returned another way, and I spotted a huge and architecturally beautiful building, all alone on a distant shore. I asked the boatman to go closer, but he refused. It was the slaughterhouse, and he assured me that only the fact that no wind blew in our direction had prompted him to get even that close. It stood there so grand and lonely, mirrored in the shining bay like something from a fairy tale. It was the prettiest slaughterhouse I ever saw.

## *Ciudad Obregón*

THE sketch of a saddlemaker reminds me of my friend, Mr. Kibby, of Ciudad Obregón. Mr. Kibby's leather shop is one of the most interesting spots in this bustling industrial town. As a tourist attraction, Ciudad Obregón would register below zero, since it seems to be trying in every way to become as American as possible. The result could hardly be called picturesque any more than many of our own cities that are suffering from growing pains.

Once the town was a peaceful little village named Cajeme, after the Yaqui chieftain. Irrigation brought a rice boom, and mills, for added employment. This sudden prosperity, with influx of imported goods, had some startling results. I saw electric refrigerators in kitchens with dirt floors, sitting alongside of earthen water ollas and stone metates. "Ads," for boxing matches, were pasted over bullfight posters. American-made radios blared American-played jazz from almost every doorway; and one place even had a pinball machine—which, by the way, was literally coining money. When I read some American writers on the subject of "How the standard of living should be raised in Mexico," I always wonder if they have ever visited Ciudad Obregón.

The people seem pretty happy, however, and the town has several redeeming features; principally, the saddle and leather shop, and its genial proprietor, Mr. Kibby.

Some Americans seem to have the ability to live in a country for many years and make their living there without allowing it to change them in any way or ever absorbing a bit of its real feeling, but—not so my friend Kibby. His place is a rallying point for American rice planters and millmen, who sit around in the after-





noon over a cold glass of beer and discuss things American. On the other hand, almost every Mexican gentleman within a hundred-mile radius counts him a friend; and many times the two groups meet on this common ground, finding that they like each other for reasons other than strict business.

Then, there is the third angle of the social life that converges on the leather shop. This is the group of incoming Americans. Business men, scientists, writers, artists, and game-hunters have somehow found out, over the "grapevine," that Kibby knows just about everyone in Sonora worth knowing, and how to get to all the places they want to find. He can write letters of introduction to head men in inland villages that change the whole aspect of things; or barter with the Yaqui tribes for some needed industrial material. Everyone comes to Kibby for information, and gets it.

His office is a clearinghouse for all this, plus his own businesses, which include a hog ranch and several other projects. It is the sort of place where one feels at home the minute he sits down, but somehow never is able to get acquainted with all the things. The desk is littered with piles of letters, boxes of old coins, odd rocks, and maybe a map showing the way to some "lost gold mine." The walls are covered with rare skins, photos sent from hundreds of friends, and calendars of every vintage and several nationalities. Even the ceiling is hung with old spurs, Indian baskets, a stuffed eagle in flight, bright-colored Indian hammocks, and odds and ends too numerous to mention or even to see at one time.

No matter what the visitor might be interested in—be it botany, zoology, mining or agriculture—Kibby can go over to the wall, or dig down in a drawer or box, and produce something interesting and unheard of along that line. Naturally, the kind of people one meets here are just as interesting and varied as the objects in the room.

I remember meeting an old gentleman from the Dominican Republic there one afternoon. This chap, it seems, collects rare plants that are used for food and medicines, and then establishes them on his estate. He was passing through town and saw an odd, gourdlike, smooth-skinned fruit; hard as a rock. The man in the market said it was used for medicine. All you had to do was to cut

a hole in the top, pour some gin or tequila over the dried pulp and heart-shaped seeds; and the next morning the medicine was ready to use. There seemed to be some doubt in the mind of the seller just what it would cure; but he said it must be very good for something, since he sold a great many. Each customer got them for a different ailment.

This chap had bought several for seed, and was over at Kibby's trying to discover what type of tree, shrub, or vine produced the strange thing. Kibby wasn't quite sure, either, but he had called up the Commissioner of Forestry, who promised to be down in a few minutes. Then he sent out for some cold beer; and the conversation ricocheted from the habits of boa constrictors through such subjects as the sex practices of the Australian bushmen, and the probability of the great ice masses in the glacial age having affected the level of the rest of the seas, thus connecting islands now separated and even continents. Our friend had traveled and read a great deal; and the beer spurred him on. He was a fountain of interesting and unheard of information. Howard and I were a bit uneasy; since we had left our wives at the hotel and had intended to be gone only a short time. Each time we rose to go, our friend broke into another story which we couldn't miss; or Kibby countered with a Mexican yarn that kept us there.

Finally, we decided to make a break for it before we lost our happy homes; but were stalled by the gentleman from the Dominican Republic, who insisted that he was an expert on how to handle women. Being a bachelor himself, he was sure that most husbands approached the problem of handling their wives in the wrong manner. He said if we would but stay a little longer, he would give us the lowdown on how to handle women; and he did. Personally, I have never had the nerve to put any of it in practice, but, hearing him tell it, the whole thing sounded mighty simple. I remember one of the several dozen stories he used to illustrate his various points. He was bringing home the importance of presence of mind.

The husband, it seemed, liked his poker games as thoroughly as his wife detested them. He was coming home late, with the utmost care and finesse, born from long practice. He negotiated the



hall stairs, shoes in hand, without a sound; opened the bedroom door without a squeak, and was about to get into his bed, when he had to sneeze. They had twin beds, and the family pet slept alongside his wife's bed. She turned over, partially awakened, and extended one hand. "Was that you, Rover?" she asked. The gentleman, with presence of mind, licked her hand.

Finally, the "Jefe Forestal" arrived, and, after examining the fruit carefully, stated that he, too, had seen it in the market place for sale; but no one, except the Indians, ever saw it growing. But he knew how to solve our friend's problem. All he had to do was to plant the seed and sooner or later it would grow up into the tree, shrub, or vine; and the whole mystery would be taken care of. Our friend was delighted by this bit of philosophy, and agreed that it was the only sensible course to follow; since there was no way of changing the character of the plant, anyway.

About then, the traveler seemed to have a change of heart and said that he felt we had better get back to the hotel, to our wives. We started to bid him good-by; but he would hear nothing of it. He would accompany us for protection, he said. After all, it was entirely his fault that we had stayed so long; and he was sure that the ladies would not be so rude as to reprimand us in the presence of a stranger, especially since he had decided to take all four of us to dinner.

The dinner was good; the host was entertaining; and the wives were polite, and pleased. The man was so altogether charming, in confessing that he had purposely kept us till late, so he would have this excuse to avoid dining alone, that I thought we had been forgiven. It almost worked. His hypnotic powers seemed to have turned the trick. The next morning, however, in the cold light of day, the whole affair seemed to lose its romance, for the girls; and we got the dressing down, at the breakfast table, that we should have had at dinner. I tried to find the gentleman, to get a few more lessons; but he had left on the early train.

Since that first afternoon, I have visited Mr. Kibby often, and stayed as a guest in his house. There has never been a dull moment. I remember the tropical fruit salad that Pilar served one day; made of mangoes, papayas, sapotas, and pineapples cubed and nearly

frozen in the refrigerator; and the chicken enchiladas, baked with —thick cream. Pilar can cook better than any other Mexican woman I have ever known.

One day, I arrived in town and Kibby informed me that the oyster season had just opened. We went down the block to a large high-vaulted room where planters were sipping their afternoon beer, and eating raw oysters. Boys with pushcarts came into the place, with live oysters, and opened them while we ate.

Oysters with chili sauce and crackers, washed down with Carta Blanca beer, make an unbeatable combination. I am sure I ate several dozen. We finally discovered that it was about dinnertime, and returned to Kibby's house. Pilar met us at the door.

"I know how much you like oysters," she informed me, "so I bought some nice fresh ones in the market. I have them fixed three ways: raw, in the cocktail sauce; stewed in the soup; and baked, with fresh green corn."

We sat down to that table and cleaned up every dish. That's what I mean when I say Pilar can cook.

I cannot imagine myself passing through Ciudad Obregón without a visit with my friends, Kibby and Pilar. There is something stimulating about a woman who can cook that way, and a man who is equally proficient in raising hogs, eating oysters, or playing polo.

## *Big-game Hunting in a Cow Pasture*

IT ALL started out with a story about "giants," overheard one afternoon in the office of my friend Kibby in Ciudad Obregón. Kibby hadn't actually seen the bones of the "giant," but the druggist had some in his back room, and they had been causing considerable conjecture in the community. The thing sounded too wild to be true, but we thought as long as we were seeing the country we might just as well look over "giant bones" as anything else, so down the dusty street we trooped to the druggist's.

By the time we had arrived the bones had caused so much commotion that the proprietor of the drugstore had placed some of the most striking ones in a glass case. There they lay, as big as you please, among the herbs and laxative pills. If the druggist had boasted a show window, they would doubtless have had an honored spot, but now they were forced to compete with patent remedies and assorted rubber goods.

I am not a paleontologist, but I have been interested in vertebrate fossils since my teens, when I used to spend summer afternoons helping Dr. J. Z. Gilbert clean tar from the remains of saber-toothed tigers from the La Brea pits, near Los Angeles. There is something about such things that gets in one's blood, and never wholly disappears. There are countless subvarieties of the collecting virus, and at different times in my life I have been exposed to a rather wide selection. Unfortunately, most of them remain at least in a latent form, and a sight such as we found in the druggist's showcase is all that is needed to bring on a fresh relapse, with all of its startling symptoms. There, gleaming dully in the midst of that pile of bones, was a perfect tooth of a Rhynchotherian masto-

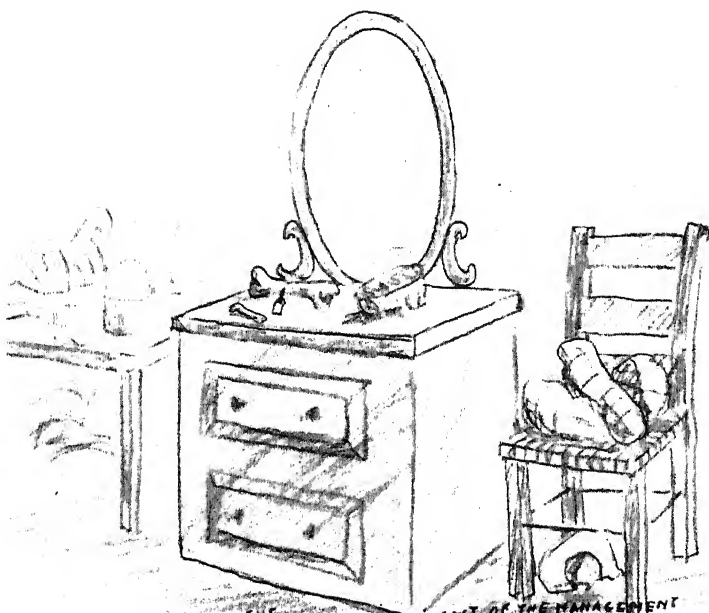
don. I looked at Howard, and Howard looked at me. We agreed that we were practically off on a fossil hunt—as soon as we found out a few of the essential facts; such as the location and the accessibility of the “ancient graveyard,” so glowingly described by the pharmacist.

We had planned on resuming our journey southward in the morning; but after finding that the bones came from the farm of the druggist’s cousin, only a day’s trip away, Howard suddenly realized that there would be just as many insects to collect in this sierra as in any other. I felt sure there would be subjects for my paint brush; and we could sort of collect fossils on the side.

The next morning we were off with our wives and possessions, after posting a letter to the Frick Foundation of Vertebrate Paleontology of the American Museum of Natural History. We happened to know that mastodons were one of their strong interests, and we proposed to them that we make a small reconnaissance collection, and map the new field, while we were in the vicinity.

We were armed with a letter of introduction to the cousin, whose name was Jesus Pennenuneri. It seems that Jesus P., who operated a small store in the village, was the brother of the ranch owner who had found the bones. The brother was named, fittingly enough, “Angel.” It sounded like a holy family, but, after we met them, we agreed that must have been due to a very devout mother.

Jesus Pennenuneri owned not only the one store in town, but also the largest house. When he had read the letter from his cousin he told us the house was ours, and he seemed to mean it. Nothing would do but we unpack and make ourselves at home. We insisted on paying our way, since we might stay some time, and finally he consented to this, as we were adamant on the matter, pointing out that we would have to sleep and eat someplace while we hunted bones. Our letter of introduction had described us as “Doctors of Science” (which neither of us was), but it impressed the population no end. Before we had unpacked half of our things, folks began to arrive with all sorts of natural and historical curiosities. We bought some of the stone hammers and other Indian relics, but postponed purchasing any bones, or teeth, until the finders would show us where they originated. To have paid out money for



FOSSILS IN THE  
HOTEL ROOM MUCH TO THE DISGUST OF THE MANAGEMENT



these would have been the spark setting off a regular gold rush in fossils which would probably destroy valuable data, and many perfectly good specimens. It was hard to turn down rare fossil teeth, offered for a Mexican dime, each; but we held out with promises of much better reward to those willing to take us to the source of their discoveries.

Our hosts came in while we were getting our things straightened around, and asked if Howard and I would care to accompany him while he made us acquainted with the "sanitary facilities" of the household. This happened to fit right into our mood. "Exhibit A" was the bath. Here was the only shower in town, and a "dandy." In a small room off the main patio a high framework supported a large gas tank taken from a wrecked truck. A ladder leaned against this framework, so the mozo-of-all-work could climb up and fill the tank with several ollas of water from the nearby river. From the bottom of the tank protruded a pipe with a valve terminating in a gallon can, with nailholes punched in the bottom. It looked like a lot of work for the mozo, but there was no denying its efficiency. A bather could get good and wet all over with the contraption, and we could see that the owner was justifiably proud of his luxury. We were more interested in the "escusado," however, so we were led to another small room, also opening on the front patio. When our host indicated it, with a sweeping gesture, we were somewhat taken aback. The room was entirely bare, but for two neat piles of corncobs. The walls were unbroken, except by the entrance door and a small square hole, on the ground level. A few hungry chickens were scratching about on the earthen floor. Our host shooed them out, and shut a small wooden door to the opening, which connected with a chicken pen. We began to catch on to the general idea. Our host elaborated with the information that the corncobs were to be taken from the pile on the right, and discarded to the left.

"Before you leave," he continued, "please open the little door to let the chickens in. This keeps everything muy sanitario!"

We were in no mood to quibble. It was either this arrangement or the nearest bush; and bushes weren't common here. Anyway, the chickens of our host might just as well have the benefit as those

running loose in the village. This ingenious fellow had simply produced an orderly arrangement of the same conditions that existed in most other settlements in the hills, with the added advantage of privacy.

It was really a great step ahead, but we had a little difficulty getting our wives to see the point. There was something distinctly revolting, to them, in the idea of the hungry chickens. We tried to remind them of the eating habits of chickens in a barnyard, or pig sty, in the States; but this thing had a personal touch to it. They were both pretty good sports about it, however, and in a few days all of us accepted the "sanitary arrangements" with the complacency that one must acquire if he is to travel in rural sections of any foreign land.

The shower was very refreshing, and more than compensated for everything else. We felt better about the mozo when we found we could tip him a little extra for each bath, and the money helped to feed a large and growing family.

By the time supper was served we were all scrubbed and wearing clean clothes. The village looked a hundred percent better, and the smells that emanated from the kitchen would have been appetizing to less hungry people. It was obvious that the hostess had "done herself proud." A clean white tablecloth and real plates welcomed us. Stacks of excellent tortillas and steaming cups of coffee were already at each plate, and, as we were seated, the two daughters came in with the other dishes. Things were progressing nicely when the soup arrived. It smelled wonderful. It tasted as good as it smelled, and I was half through mine before I really noticed the fact that it was a chicken stew. The other three Americans were doing nicely by theirs, so I said nothing. My early training, as a missionary's child in inland China, had hardened me against prejudices in foods. I had been told then to "eat the food set before me," and had followed to the letter of the law. The food that an animal or bird consumes has no effect on my imagination; for I realized, long ago, if we were to worry about the diet of the creatures we ate, we would probably discard over half of our own standard menu, starting with such things as lobsters, crabs and fish—not to mention pork.



The table conversation was so lively that no one seemed to pay particular attention to the food, aside from the mechanical process of putting it away. Suddenly I looked up to see Eunice staring at her dish as if she had seen a particularly revolting ghost. Our hostess, like most Mexican cooks, didn't believe in wasting a single edible item of a chicken, when preparing soup. Unfortunately, Eunice had drawn the portion which contained the neatly skinned foot of the bird. There it lay, staring up at her; and I saw a pale-green color coming to her face. Knowing Eunice, I rushed to her side and led her out of the door, into the street, in time to avert a catastrophe.

She was terribly sick and, later, very embarrassed. She didn't know how to explain matters to the hostess without hurting her feelings. I took care of the situation by saying that my wife had an upset stomach—from the long ride. Car sickness is common among people in Sonora, who ride only once or twice a year; and the explanation was accepted without a hitch. Fortunately for Marie, the lamplight was dim in the dining room and she was at the other end of the table. She did not know of the incident. She was horrified the next morning when we told her, but she and Eunice both enjoyed the eggs we had for breakfast. The process of feminine reasoning will always be a baffling mystery to me.

We started out, bright and early, to visit the ranch of Angel P. He was a charming fellow and said we were more than welcome to all the bones we wanted from his pasture land; but we would have to wait until he finished his wheat threshing, before he could let us have riding horses. That is how we came to see our first back-country threshing. We soon forgot our impatience to see the "bone-yard."

Angel had built a new house, and we had to inspect it. The beams and upright timbers were of a hard brown wood that was unfamiliar to us, and we asked what it was. When we were told it was mesquite, we found it hard to believe. The mesquite of our desert would not produce anything larger than a fence post, straight enough to be used; but here were twenty-foot timbers, squared with an adze from giant mesquite trees that were growing

about us, literally so tall that we hadn't recognized them as our old desert friends in a subtropical setting.

There was quite a noise outside—the trample of horses' hoofs and the cries of vaqueros. They had started the threshing. A large corral inclosed a stack of cut wheat. The horses and mules of the ranch were herded in an adjoining corral, and as we came out to witness the event, the gates were opened and the animals driven round and round the stack of wheat at a gallop. Each circle cut more and more wheat from the center stack. It dropped to the hard-packed threshing floor, where it was trampled by the running hoofs. The ranch hands kept the herd moving with long poles, poked through the corral bars, and shouts that echoed from the nearby hills. It was quite a sight. We wished for a movie camera to supplement our still pictures. I got out my paints and made a quick sketch.

In what seemed a very short time, the whole stack had been trampled to a pulp, and the stock was transferred back to the empty corral. It was the old story of "many hands make a light work," only this time it was hoofs.

We accepted Angel's invitation to lunch before we rode out to the hunt; and while we were eating our beans and tortillas and drinking our black coffee, he explained the rest of the wheat-threshing process. Stacked against the wall were some of the tools. Pitchforks had been ingeniously fashioned from the ribs of the giant cardon cactus. Taking advantage of the toughness of this plant's structural skeleton, the hill folks produce a great many useful articles. In this case, a heavy main rib was used for the handle. It had been cut so that several flaring ribs branched from it, where it connected with one of the "arms" of the plant. These flaring ribs had been trimmed and sharpened to form the tines of the fork and, after being soaked in water for a few days, had been dried under a weight, to hold the tines in line. The other winnowing tool was made from a cactuswood handle with a flat, very light wooden shovel attached.

Their operation was very simple. The straw was first forked away from the grain and chaff and then, when the wind was favorable, the final cleaning of the grain took place. Men, armed

with these light wooden shovels, scooped up grain and chaff and tossed it into the air. The chaff blew to one side, and the grain fell in a neat pile.

Our host served us a very tasty sweet for dessert, and for a moment I was afraid I had lost a fossil-hunting partner, to the science of entomology. Each serving was a complete wasps' nest, about the size of a saucer. It was divided into cells, like an ordinary honeycomb. It had a flat surface below, and a shallow conical back, terminating in a small "stem" where the nest had been attached to the limb of the tree. These were eaten whole, like cookies, wax and all. In fact, on closer inspection, we found that some of the cells contained eggs; but that didn't seem to spoil the flavor, which was really very mild and pleasing. We saved Howard for paleontology, when he discovered that certain small boys on the ranch collected these nests at five centavos each, and would be glad to furnish a series much cheaper, and with fewer stings, than he could possibly do it himself.

It was only about three miles over the hill to the pasture land where the bones were to be found, and we were soon inspecting the area with keen interest. It was an old playa or lakebed which had originally had no outlet. Silt from the surrounding hills had gradually filled this basin to a point where water had found its way over the brink to a steep canyon below. Now the lakebed was being carried away, by erosion, through a network of shallow gullies converging on the comparatively new overflow. Bones were everywhere. In no time, we realized that this was no ordinary deposit. Real geologic history was here for anyone to understand who wished to spend the time and do a little plain deductive reasoning. The arrangement of bones made it obvious that the animals had met death in the spot where they had been preserved. Bones, not carried by recent erosion, were articulated as in life. The animals had obviously been trapped in mud, where they had been buried by subsequent deposits.

Mastodon, giant bison, and a huge armored slothlike animal called the glyptodon were the most striking animals found the first day; but, as we covered the area, the list became larger and included many smaller forms.

It took little imagination to realize that these beasts had been driven by some common catastrophe into the mud of the ancient lake, where they had sunk and been preserved for posterity. A little digging soon disclosed the nature of this catastrophe. The mud was interspersed with thin layers of volcanic ash and small lava bombs, imbedded in what must have been soft mire at the time of eruption. There were even light streaks, marking the paths of these hot stones as they had penetrated the mud. In some places we found bits of ash which, under a handglass, showed wood structure. We also found pieces of charcoal, from a forest that must have burned to the very edges of the lake. Later digging produced fragile leaf casts, some charred and others, just slightly darker stains, in the mud; but all, unmistakably, leaves that had been driven ahead of the fire, and had fallen into the muck. Nature had set a gigantic trap and sprung it on what must have been a rather complete cross section of the fauna of that time. It was a fossil hunter's paradise.

We didn't carry away anything except some of the very durable teeth, the first day; but the next day, and for two weeks thereafter, we were as busy as beavers, uncovering, shellacking, and placing in plaster casts remains of animals that had disappeared from the earth millions of years before the oldest civilizations. The girls fell into the spirit of the thing, and we had a hard time getting them to leave in time to get back for supper, each evening. Material was so plentiful that we never went more than a few inches below the surface, for all the specimens that we could possibly handle. I forgot all about painting pictures, and Howard collected very few insects and plants. A fossil field of this sort seldom falls to the lot of the most well planned museum expeditions. We knew how very fortunate we were, and enjoyed every minute of it.

Indian relics kept coming in at the flat rate of ten centavos per piece, if the artifact was undamaged, until finally we were forced to call a halt, so we would have room in the panel truck to transport the fossils.

We made a lot of friends through our car radio. Each evening at least half the population of the village gathered round to listen to music and news. It was the first radio to come to this community,

and many of the old folks, who were averse to travel, had never seen or heard one before. One old woman insisted that we had records inside the contraption—like her son's phonograph. When we convinced her, finally, that the sounds were actually coming from points as distant as Mexico City and Del Rio, Texas, she refused to get near, but came back every night to listen.

One evening there was a full moon, and some of the boys brought guitars and played for us. After they had gone through their repertoire, I borrowed one of the guitars and sang some American cowboy songs. They could not understand a word, but it enchanted them. Their favorite was "Tumbling Tumbleweeds," and they asked for it several times. When I handed the guitar back, a pair of Yaqui cowboys came forward and with a polite, "con permiso," took over the guitars. They retuned the instruments so that every chord was in a minor key, and finally broke into song. It was beautiful and wild. There was an elemental quality that reminded me of the rugged Bacatete mountains, where they were born; a weird plaintive effect that was suggestive of the Orient. I have heard some of these songs, since, but I shall never forget that night and those two white-clad Yaquis, singing in the moonlight. We couldn't understand a word of what they were singing, yet we could get the feel of each song, from the rhythm and tone. One of these chaps had a way of hitting the strings and the wood of the guitar at the same time. It sounded as if distant drums were matching rhythm with his tune. The guitar became a percussion instrument.

Packing the fossils in shipping crates in Ciudad Obregón took several hot, dreary days, and the condition of our hotel rooms was the cause of no little concern on the part of the management. It would have been pretty dull business without the cheerful companionship of our friend Mr. Kibby. He would breeze into the room where we were packing bones, and we would forget the discomforts of the evil-smelling shellac and the sweat, dripping from our noses. To talk to Kibby is to take a mental tonic. He used to sit and try to imagine what one of the glyptodons looked like, covered with the six-sided scales of bone, half an inch thick.

"Times must have been pretty tough in those days," he would remark, "for an animal as well protected as that to become extinct."

It was with a sigh of relief that we finally shipped the last crate of bones, and headed for the hill country where it would be a little cooler and considerably more interesting to an entomologist and an artist. The street scenes in Ciudad Obregón were ruined for painting by American billboards, and the only insects worth mentioning were the bugs that insisted on flying into our soup, each evening in the hotel. It was the same kind, every night chicken stew.

## *San Bernardo at the End of the Road*

THE last road ends in San Bernardo, but trails lead off in every direction: to Chinipas, Los Pilares, Loreto and Batopilas—magic names in the history of mining. Most of these places are in the neighboring state of Chihuahua; for San Bernardo is near the border.

For many years this little town at the edge of the Sierras has been an unloading point for freight wagons. Here, supplies are reloaded on mules and burros, to be carried over the mountains to the mines. Here also, long trains of dust-covered burros bring in the logs for coffin lumber and rafters. Since there is no road beyond San Bernardo, these logs must be dragged over the long hot trails; a burro on each side of a large one, or two small poles on each side of a burro.

Other pack trains arrive with ore or bullion from the mines; but these are fewer than in the "good old days before the revolution." Everyone in San Bernardo talks of those days when British and American concessions worked the mines in Chinipas and Batopilas. The town hummed with excitement then; and pack trains were arriving and departing like the traffic in a big-town depot. Folks who remain like to tell of the ore brought in from Batopilas—so full of silver that a blow with a hammer would mash but not break it. I have a piece of this ore in my specimen case today. An old woman in San Bernardo had kept it in her sewing basket, and sold it to me. The rock—what there is of it—is snow-white calcite. The silver is still bright and untarnished, and makes up two-thirds of the weight of the stone.

At the edge of town are piles of rusting mining machinery that was awaiting transportation over the mountains when revolutions

interfered. Tarahumare Indian runners used to carry on a regular messenger service to outlying mining districts; but today, Ameliano is about the only one left who calls himself a runner.

Ameliano is proud of his ancestry. Men of his tribe have been great runners for centuries. Even today, they perform feats of distance running that would win the marathon, hands down, if they could be induced to enter the Olympic Games. Among these people, it was the practice to have annual races which lasted from daylight to sunset and covered a rough course over a very high mountain. The winner of this race was considered a local hero; and those who failed to finish the race before the sun went down were not eligible to take a wife from the tribe. Thus, by a process of selection, the Tarahumares have become the finest distance runners in the world.

We liked Ameliano and used to sit on Carlota's porch and talk with him by the hour. Besides being a wonderful runner, Ameliano was a real student of nature. When we pointed out a bird, he could not only give us its Indian and Spanish names, but its nesting and feeding habits. He was equally well informed on the animals of the district, and an accomplished tracker and trapper. He often remarked that a man must first know how a deer thinks, to track him down in the thorn forest.

In the realm of plant life, Ameliano was just as well informed. He could give us the Indian and Spanish names for many plants that were never named in Latin; also, the medicinal qualities, or food value, and the methods of preparation. He was a gold mine of information; yet, by many standards, he would be classed as an ignorant man. He could neither read nor write. This man, with such a store of knowledge of things about him, felt deeply about his illiteracy. We taught him the alphabet, and how to spell out words, a little at a time. The marvel of reading from the pages of a book almost staggered him. When he had finally learned to painfully scrawl his own name, it was one of the proudest moments of his life.

So long as our questions pertained to things of the brush country and canyons, they were always answered directly and satisfactorily; but when we brought up some abstract thing like a political







or social question, his answer was the same: "Posible sí, posible no, ¿quien sabe?"

He couldn't get into much of an argument with an answer like that. Perhaps that was why he had so many friends. If he had been born in this country, it is a toss-up whether he would have been a great athlete, a famous scientist, or a diplomat. The last time I saw Ameliano, he had taken his fourth wife. He wanted me to see her at once; so we walked over to his house. There she was, hard at work over the metate, grinding masa for tortillas. She was young and buxom, and very friendly. She said, "Ameliano had spoken often of his friend, Don Juan."

When we finally left the house, Ameliano walked silently along beside me. I could feel that he was struggling to say something, and didn't know just how to begin. Finally it came out.

"In your country, Señor, is it customary for a man of sixty-five to marry with a woman of twenty-two?" I answered that it was hardly customary, but that stranger things had happened.

"Yes, but this is not a strange thing for me," he countered. "You must understand that this is not a freak marriage. It is customary among us Tarahumares. We are men, even after the age of sixty, and we need women. Our women age young, in this hot climate; this is my fourth wife, and probably, the last. I could hardly be expected to face old age alone, with no one to care for me. She is a fine woman, and very loyal. We both think a great deal of you; so, with your permission, we would like to name the first boy Juan."

He left me at the inn, and as he walked away with his easy-swinging gait, I thought of the men at home in cities who considered themselves old at forty.

Carlota, who ran the inn, was another colorful character. We always stayed at her place. She usually had a large paring knife, either in her hand or tucked into her sash, and when she made a gesture, the knife flashed. This habit may have sprung from the fact that most of her customers were mule-drivers; but we found it very picturesque, once we were accustomed to it. Her rooms were large and clean, according to San Bernardo standards. Of course there were pigs in the kitchen, and sometimes the pet cow

walked right into our bedroom; but the only thing that really bothered us was the habit the chickens had of roosting on the head of our bed, if we left our door open. Chickens may be all right in their place, but in a bedroom they are hardly immaculate.

We got to like Carlota immensely, and never tired of hearing her tell of the "good old days." She informed us that, strange as it might seem, she was once a very beautiful woman—so lovely, in fact, that she became the mistress of a wealthy English mining engineer, who had built this large house for her. Had he lived, she would not now be forced to make a public inn of the place; but the "Revolucionarios" shot him. She was away, at the time, hiding in the hills. He had buried a considerable fortune, somewhere on the place, but had been killed before he could tell her where it was. Carlota had a colorful past, and was proud of it.

After we had become well acquainted, she asked us one day if we would like to see her shrine. There were no churches for miles around and, if there had been, they would have been destroyed or closed by the revolutionists, who were very anti-religious. For this reason Carlota had hidden her shrine. Even though things had relaxed, she was still secretive about it.

She led us to the back of the patio to a large room used as a chicken coop, and pulled an old piece of canvas away from a hidden door. When she opened the door, we were startled to see candles burning in front of a little altar. Bright religious pictures covered the walls and there, behind the candles, was a large crucifix with a figure of Christ done by some really good Italian craftsman. The thing that made us catch our breath, however, was the lace pants! Carlota explained that the "Christ" was completely naked, so she had fashioned these little lace pants in the interest of modesty. A naked Christ might be all right for Italians, but it wouldn't go in San Bernardo.

We didn't eat with Carlota because there was a much better place at the home of a Chinaman, by the name of Pancho. This chap had been born of a Chinese couple, working for an Englishman at Chinipas. He had never seen China, nor a dozen Chinese in his life; but he spoke both English and Spanish with an accent that would have sounded natural in San Francisco's Chinatown.

Pancho was married to the largest Mexican woman in town, and he adored her with the adoration that little men lavish on outsized women. I think, too, that he was a little afraid of her; and I am sure most of the people in town shared this fear. Don Juan Arjuayas was the head man or "presidente," but Pancho's wife ran the town, and no one disputed her right.

They had a daughter who would have been considered a beauty in Hollywood, but in the hill country was doomed to be an old maid. Being of mixed blood, she was not suitable as a wife of an upper-class Mexican, and her mother would never think of allowing her to marry a peon. She confided to me, once, that she had hopes of finding some American mining engineer who would take her as a mistress.

The food at Pancho's was beyond anything one could dare to expect in that part of Sonora. Pancho had really learned to cook and had never forgotten. A dinner at his house, of braised venison, smoked chicken, candied sweet potatoes, and French fries, was enough to make a visiting American sing the praises of Pancho across the length and breadth of Mexico, and many of them do—to this day. At times, the little fellow would come out beaming from the kitchen with such concoctions as a lime meringue pie, or date pudding. We ate many a meal at his house, and never had the same menu twice. Dessert was almost always a pleasant surprise, to be borne from the kitchen personally by the smiling cook. He even possessed the finer sensibilities. I heard him explaining one day, to his wife and daughter, why they must be sure and keep the pet pigs and dogs out of the dining room when Americans were eating. They both marveled at such an odd custom, but decided to humor us.

One of the last letters I received from that part of Sonora brought the sad news that Pancho had died. I wonder if his wife still rules the town, or if she has ever found an American mining engineer for her daughter. San Bernardo won't seem the same.

I still want to climb high among the totem-pole peaks that rise along the Mayo River and to photograph the Indian writings, there at their bases. This group of stone spires called "Los Pilares," dominates the landscape. Somehow we could never find the time to get

there, nor to many of the dozens of other places that Ameliano would have liked to take us.

Silver may boom again in the hills of Chihuahua, and San Bernardo may change; but I hope, when I get back, Ameliano will be waiting to guide me; and Carlota will still burn candles in her chicken coop, in front of a Christ in lace pants.

## *Tepopa Interlude*

THE name "Tepopa" brings back some of the pleasantest memories of my life, but more than anything else, I remember a little waterfall that forms a moving, sparkling screen in front of a small cave. I recall siesta hours in that cave behind the waterfall: the changing lights that danced in rhythmic patterns on the ceiling; hummingbirds like living jewels, poised in mid-air to drink; and flame-colored dragon flies, six inches across, that darted in and out like giant motes in a sunbeam. Through it all, I remember the soft laughter of the falling water that lulled us to sleep in the middle of the day, and seemed to change its tune enough to gently waken us when siesta time was over.

Tepopa is a place of beauty—a place apart; a spot where a man can forget the world and all of its troubles. There's time and space to stop and think in Tepopa, and perhaps even to dream, but we went through a little piece of hell to get there.

It started when we rented the burros from Don Juan, the head man of the village. This good gentleman agreed to rent us three burros, all of good sound wind and in fine condition. He "forgot," however, to tell us that one of these fine animals had a small colt which had to accompany us on the journey.

This charming bit of news did not develop until the morning we were to start. When I came out into the patio of the inn, Ameliano the arriero and Don Juan were busily loading up the things that we had set out to be taken along. I noticed my painting material and sketchbox tied securely on the top of the best-looking beast of the lot, and was just about to congratulate myself, when two long

ears emerged from around the rear quarters of the animal in question.

They were pointed forward, followed by a quivering nose, and two of the most mischievous eyes I have ever seen. Ameliano and Don Juan followed my glance, and hastened to explain that the little fellow would be absolutely no trouble on the trip. Howard countered, "You're darned right he won't be any trouble. We aren't going to take him along."

The argument was long and involved, but we finally lost in favor of the baby burro. The mother, they insisted, was the finest pack burro in the sierras. Further, she was the only one available, without a wait of two or three days. The youngster was old enough to walk very well, and since he was still nursing, could under no circumstances be left behind. It was take the little jackass or wait; so we finally conceded the point. One look into the eyes of that fuzzy-faced child of the thorn forest made me shudder.

Twenty miles slip by on American highways so fast that the distance seems like nothing, but we had to walk twenty miles, and it was up hill all the way. Neither of our wives had ever walked so far in one stretch before, but they were game to try. We had been hearing of Tepopa for a long time, and were anxious to see it. The trail hadn't been used for so long that it would be impossible to travel on horseback. You see, Tepopa was haunted; and nobody except the very venturesome, such as our Tarahumare mule driver, had been there since the bandits died. In fact, hardly anyone had gone there, while they were alive, and returned with a whole skin.

We were really a little abashed as we struck off up the arroyo. I almost felt like apologizing to the baby burro for all the fuss. He was quite a gentleman, trotting along as nice as you please—making about four steps with his short little legs to his mother's one. I noticed this and decided that the real trouble would come when the poor little fellow got too tired to travel at the regular pace. I even began to feel sorry for him, which shows how very ignorant I was of baby burros.

As we traveled along, Ameliano told us more about the place we were trying to reach; how a family of brothers had turned this mountain stronghold of theirs into a veritable paradise. It seems







that when these bandits stole, they stole something that would make their lives richer. True, at times, it may have been a pretty village girl, or the best horse from some outlying ranch, but, nevertheless, these fellows favored stealing things, rather than money. As years passed by, they reached the point where they would simply ride into a village in broad daylight and call for the head man. This worthy gentleman would be presented with a list of the things they wanted as a tribute for the next year, and the village dug them up, or suffered the consequences: "So many sacks of corn and wheat, so many horses or donkeys, the white riding mare belonging to Pedro Martinez, five dozen laying hens, six fat piglets and a burro load of shoots from that banana tree in the arroyo."

The bandits were men of their word about not molesting villages that had paid tribute. They also saw to it that other bandits did not "muscle in on their racket." If they had visited Chicago, they would probably have renamed the tribute "paid protection." At any rate, these fellows must have lived a life of ease and contentment, surrounded by all of the trees and fruits they had demanded for their gardens. They had plenty of grains from the farmers, and livestock, for fresh meat and eggs. The girls they captured from time to time were probably good workers, as most Indian girls were. The terraced gardens they built attest to their industry. I rather imagine these women led a considerably happier life than if they had never been carried away as part of the tribute from a village.

The farther up the arroyo we went, the more birds there were in the trees. Tiny green parrots, the size of canaries, flew up by thousands. We saw Wright's red-billed dove, for the first time, and wondered why they had picked on the red bill for description of the bird. The beak was red, as were the feet; but the outstanding thing about this pigeon-sized dove was the bright blue color of the males. They were so brilliant that they looked artificial, and the feathers on their head and neck shone with a purple and green iridescence over blue, that was beautiful. Ameliano called them "paloma azul" (the blue dove), and we felt that this was a much better name.

We were beginning to tire, and the sun was getting hotter every

hour; but the baby burro seemed to have just gotten his stride. He started by dodging in and out between trees, ahead of his mother. The fond parent followed, regardless of the clearance, and had to be extricated from between two trees, or out from under some low-hanging branch, every few minutes. The baby burro was making at least two miles to our one, and apparently enjoying every foot of it.

About the third time Ameliano had to pull the mother burro from under an overhanging branch, where she was wedged with my paintbox, he began to swear. Most good burro and mule drivers have a fine vocabulary of invective. Ameliano stood out, among those we had met. The one thing that amused us most about his conversation with the burros was the tone of his voice. The first few blasts of "cuss words" would come in an ordinary angry tone of voice. As the trouble continued, he would raise his voice a bit, and after a prolonged session, Ameliano would be cursing in a high falsetto that made my throat sore from listening. His pitch was a sort of thermometer. Even the burros soon discovered the point in the scale where he was most likely to add action to his words.

The trail became narrow, about eleven o'clock, and climbed out of the arroyo along a very steep side hill. The bank on our left was far too steep for a baby burro to climb, and the hill below us would have made a fine toboggan slide, had there been any snow. Here, at least, we were in a stretch of trail where there would be no tangles and trouble. Ameliano could rest his hoarse voice. We were so sure everything was well that we failed to watch the little troublemaker. Suddenly he smelled something to the right, and plunged off the trail with the careless abandon of a mountain goat. Of course the mother followed, before anyone could stop her. She plunged and slid clear to the bottom, but fortunately did not break a bone. The baby, naturally, was unscathed and as happy as a lark. Ameliano's voice was well above high C when he finally got them both back on the trail. After that, he kept a firm hold on a rope to the mother. The next time our little playmate plunged over the bank, the mother took Ameliano with her! She was a very strong and determined burro!

We hardly had time to enjoy the lovely scenery about us, for

the antics of our unwanted traveling companion. Howard and I even considered knocking the rascal in the head and telling the owner that a jaguar got it, but on second thought we decided it was a bad idea. The mother might decide to balk at that very spot, and we would be hopelessly stalled.

At noon we camped beside a little rushing stream, to eat our lunch. The burros were tethered to saplings, nearby, where they could drink and graze. We met a "vaquero" while we were stopped, who told us that the upper stretch of trail was dry. He suggested that we take the next canyon over, as there was always plenty of water there in dry years. He knew, because he had found stray cattle there, more than once. We thanked him for his advice, and Ameliano asked if there was a trail out of this other canyon to the Tepopa area. He said that he had never been there, but that a friend had said it was an even better trail than the usual one.

Lunch was over and we were resting, stretched out under the shade of the trees and feeling that after all it was a pretty swell world, when all of a sudden a great commotion brought us to our feet. It seemed that the baby burro had decided the place was not interesting enough, and had struck out across country. The tree where the mother was tethered was not very large, and the soil was damp, so she just pulled up the tree and started out after her wayward offspring, braying like a banshee.

The afternoon passed much as the forenoon had, except that the mother burro got tangled up in trees oftener, and the baby seemed to be more full of pep with every mile. We were getting higher and higher now, and the scenery was changing. Finally, we turned up the canyon that the cowboy had indicated, and found ourselves in a veritable wonderland. Vegetation was rank and tropical. The canyon was narrower and deeper, and the trail led under fern-decked cliffs that were beyond description. The whole country was solid limestone. We began to wonder about caves.

Suddenly, I looked above me to follow the flight of a bright-colored bird, and saw a sight that I had never seen before, nor have seen since. There, hanging from a towering ledge, was a curtain of limestone stalactites, some of them twenty or thirty feet long. We

could hardly believe our eyes. We had all seen such things in limestone caves, but out in an open canyon they looked oddly out of place. We discussed the reasons as we traveled along. Already we had noticed how shallowly rooted the trees and giant cacti were in this region, and we asked Ameliano if the wind ever blew here. He shook his head and answered, "Posible sí, but I have never been here when the wind was blowing." In the still air of the canyon, it might be that stalactites could form just as in a cave, but we even toyed with the idea that the canyon was nothing but an extended cave that had lost its roof.

Farther on, we saw even larger groups of these stalactites, and some of them were "alive," that is, they were still covered with a thin film of moisture, and water was dripping from their points. Here and there great masses of them had fallen (probably from earthquakes) and broken on the canyon floor. We examined some of these pieces and found that they were not as compact and heavy as ordinary cave onyx, but were somewhat porous, due to algae and mosses that had developed on their surfaces, as they grew. Actually they were more of a calcareous tufa than crystalline onyx; but there was no denying they were stalactites and that they were forming there in an open canyon, by the thousands.

The baby burro had been behaving strangely for the last mile. He had followed along as though he was part of the pack train, causing no trouble whatsoever. We began to think he had finally become trail-broken when, suddenly, he laid himself down in a pretty patch of grass. He didn't make any great show of the matter, as he had his other escapades. He just quietly lay down. The mother looked over her shoulder and balked. Ameliano pulled on the rope. Nothing happened. Howard and I picked the baby up and put it on its feet. He lay down again. We pushed and shouted, but he had decided that this was as far as he was going that day. We couldn't carry him; he was too heavy. A forest fire would not have budged that faithful mother, if the baby had decided to stay.

It was about four-thirty, anyway, and we were in interesting country; so we decided to make camp. We couldn't have found a better place, but we hated to have a "half-pint jackass" tell us so.

We had decided, when we left, that we would eat off the

country as much as possible, but we had put in some canned meat in case the game might be scarce. It developed that we needn't have, for game of every sort was to be had within a few hundred yards of our camps. I took the four-ten and went out to bag a mess of the blue doves, while Howard tried to climb a cliff to a hole that looked like the mouth of a cave.

My hunting was a success, and the girls were putting the birds on to cook when Howard came in, very tired, ready to admit that the cliff could not be climbed without equipment, but that he was surer than ever that the hole was the mouth of a cave. The hundreds of bats that flew over our camp, later in the evening, would indicate that there must be caves in the region.

Dove, boiled with rice and a little chili, makes a very satisfactory supper after a hard day's walk, and we felt pretty satisfied with ourselves as we lay on our cots and watched the fireflies and glowworms glimmering among the trees.

The baby burro had regained his good spirits and was frolicking about his tired mother as if he was at home in the pasture. We couldn't be "sore" at him. He was really a cute little devil. Ameliano had made sure that the mother was tied to a tree, two feet in diameter, and hoped for the best.

The next morning we were off early and up the canyon, rested and refreshed. The stream became smaller and smaller as we ascended, and finally dwindled down to occasional unconnected pools. I began to wonder about all the water our informer had described, and to wish we had brought the large canteens that Howard had assured me would be an unnecessary weight. The water holes became farther and farther apart, and shallower and dirtier. Many were covered with bright green scum. Finally Ameliano stopped and watered the burros at a better-looking hole, and took a big drink himself. We looked at the stuff and, although we were pretty thirsty, we could not get up the courage to drink it. We had the one gourd water jar along. It held about two quarts; we could get a long way on that (we thought).

Finally, the canyon became so choked with giant rocks and thick trees that we could go no farther. There seemed to be no trail leading up either side, and the situation looked pretty bad.

Ameliano decided that our informant of the day before had been a cheerful liar; and that we were trapped in a spot where the only way out would be to climb a ridge to our right, and get back into the canyon that we had intended following in the first place. We agreed that if we were to be lost, it would be better to have it happen on a trail that the guide had at least been over before; so up the ridge we started.

I cannot ever do justice to the description of our climb up that long hot ridge, or the sliding, tearing descent into the other canyon. The fact that a great deal of the way had to be cleared by Ameliano, with his machete, and that the hill was so steep that we each had to push a burro, to keep them going, will give a general idea. The brush was about two feet higher than our heads, and well sprinkled with dozens of species of cacti. Every plant, large and small, carried thorns or spines of some sort. We were at the level of the Sonoran thorn forest, and realized for the first time the full meaning of the name. The sun became hotter and hotter, and the water in the gourd bottle got lower and lower. Finally we got to the bottom of the other canyon, and even the baby burro showed signs of fatigue. My mouth was as dry as cotton, and my tongue was starting to swell, but I somehow got a fiendish joy out of realizing that our frisky burro was unhappy too.

Ameliano said it was not more than two kilometers to a fine spring; that we were nearly past the dry part of the canyon. We all felt better with that news. Eventually we came to the "fine spring." It was a patch of mud where the deer had pawed, in vain, for the last drops of moisture. The water in the gourd was gone. When we tried to talk to one another, nothing came out but a strange croak that did not resemble our natural voices in the least.

Our guide looked us over, and shook his head.

"It is another league to more water," he said. "I think it would be best if you would stay here with the burros, while I run and get the gourd full. It is a shame that you did not drink well at the last water hole, in the canyon; I am still able to travel."

With no further adieu, he struck up the trail at a dog trot. The stamina of that man, in his middle sixties, was beyond our comprehension. We lay there in the shade, and dreamed of the



fine cool water that he would bring back in the gourd. It took an incredibly short time for him to make the trip, and return. Soon we heard the pad of his feet on the trail, and he came up grinning with our water. I was reminded of Kipling's "Gunga Din." When it came my turn to drink, I was reminded again of the same poem; for "It was crawlin' an' it stunk." It was wet, however, and it did, I am convinced, save our lives. When we passed that spring, an hour later, we saw that it was about twice as bad as any water we had turned down. In fact, we couldn't think of drinking any of it with Tepopa and plenty of water only a few miles ahead.

We were above the thorn forest, and now in the oak belt. The hills and mesas were covered with dry grass and dotted here and there with Sonoran white oaks that were almost leafless with the drought. This country must be a beautiful meadowland in the rainy season, but now it was parched and dry.

Finally we topped a low hill, and there, looming ahead of us, were the giant tree-clad cliffs of Tepopa. Even at that distance we could tell that there must be an abundance of water on those cliffs. Every crevice and canyon was choked with green vegetation.

The robbers' houses sat in a group on a knoll just this side of the cliff, divided from the main mountain by a shallow canyon. Down in this canyon we could hear the laughter of small waterfalls; and in the terraced gardens on the other side, we could catch the glint of dozens of little streams between the banana trees. We made the bottom of that canyon in record time. I never expect to taste a better drink in my life.

Ameliano unloaded the packs while we began exploring the garden. We found rather pithy grapefruit in bearing, and excellent limes. Some of the bananas were ripe, and a few mangoes were left; but the surprise was a couple of apricot trees loaded to the breaking point with prime fruit; we had seen no apricots in the markets. I still wonder where on earth those bandits got those trees, or the start of blackberries which were just as unusual.

The berry bushes formed a jungle, surrounding a clump of papaya trees. Ameliano spent several hours the next day cutting a trail with his machete—until we could get at this delicious fruit. In cutting the brush he discovered small, rather run-down tomato

plants, in bearing. The fruit was about the size of marbles, but very good-flavored. Later, we found chili peppers that had survived without cultivation; and a patch of old-fashioned mint surrounding one of the springs.

Game was abundant, and easily shot; fruit was to be had for the picking. Our only provisions used were pancake flour and salt. We used a good deal of our salt during the two weeks' stay; for Ameliano would bring in a tasty buck now and then. We would eat the choicest cuts, fresh; and he would salt and smoke the remainder. His venison "jerky" was the finest I have ever tasted. He made a thick salt brine to which he added powdered red chili for flavor; this served also to drive off the flies. The meat was cut in long strips and dipped in the thick brine. It was hung on a rack, over a smoldering oak fire, until a light brown; and then allowed to finish drying in the sun.

None of us cared much for liver, which pleased Ameliano very much. He would place the unsalted liver on a sharp stick, and turn it over the fire until it was brown. Then he would peel it like an apple with the tip of his machete, and eat the peeling, roasting the remaining portion, again, to produce another brown coat, until nothing was left. He explained that this was the finest thing in the world to insure good eyesight; that salt, added to the liver, would greatly decrease its medicinal powers. We all agreed that he had wonderful eyesight; but we did not try his formula.

Tepopa was an enchanted land of contrasts. We were in the altitude of the oak belt; but here, at the base of the cliff, among the many springs, was a tropical oasis. Below us, only a few hundred feet, was the beginning of the cactus-studded thorn forest that covers the hilly portions of the Mexican deserts; while above us we could see towering pines and firs on the flat-topped cliff. Between the bottom of the canyon and the top of the great cliffs was just about every combination of plant life imaginable. Great blue palms extended to within about five hundred feet of the pines. Orchids were abundant, even beyond, and cactus had adjusted itself to grow with the orchids, sometimes hanging in bunches from the trees.

Naturally the place was a botanist's paradise. Howard was mak-

ing a collection for several institutions; and we all pitched in to help. A good many new species resulted with a type locality of Tepopa, Sonora; which I defy anyone to find on a map. I found time to make several small paintings.

The two weeks passed without our knowing where they had gone. Each day blended into the next. There was something about the place that made one stop and sit, and look off over the distant hills, fading away in the haze; and wonder why we waste our time trying to live "civilized" lives in another world.

Every part of the day was like the movement of a great symphony of sound and color. The early morning was heralded by the screaming of macaws that flew in pairs from their nests in the cliffs, to feed. Then came the chorus of small songbirds that filled the sunny forenoon. Flowers bloomed on every side; and butterflies, of countless species, put them to shame. Then came the quiet time when even the little creatures of nature seemed to take their siesta, and the sounds of the waterfalls in the canyon were the dominating theme. In the afternoon the cicadas began to hum, in the trees; their drone blanketed everything else. Then, after the hush of sunset, the myriad water creatures took up the refrain. Some of the tree frogs trilled almost as shrilly as birds, and the bassos answered from the pools in the canyon. Sometimes, when the moon was bright, the call of the "lobo grande" (Sonoran timber wolf) could be heard from the cliffs above. Ameliano would pile more wood on the fire, and say he smelled the baby burro. We agreed that "the little devil" smelled.

The ghosts of Tepopa never bothered us. We stayed out of the houses, after our first exploration, because they were infested with bedbugs—which would have been a great deal more uncomfortable companions than the ghosts of bandits.

At last, we packed our treasures and rather regretfully took the trail. It is still a mystery to me why American travelers put a time limit on their adventures. It doesn't seem natural. When I go back to Tepopa, I am going for as long as I want to stay; and there won't be any baby burros.

Sometimes, when I am fully disgusted with the world and the people in it (including myself), my thoughts flash back to Tepopa.

When I close my eyes, I can still see the falling curtain to the siesta cave, glittering with transmitted sunlight, and emerald and ruby hummingbirds that come to drink; and if I keep very still, I can hear laughing water on the mossy stones.

## *The General and the Flat Tires*

IT WAS one of the hottest days I ever experienced in Mexico; and we were on a long stretch of dusty road, fifty miles from a town, when we had our first blowout. It was a new car. We were "babes in the woods" at that time about tires, and believed the salesman when he told us the four-plys, which came as standard equipment, would last a good long time. There seemed no point in changing them. This salesman didn't know much about back-country Mexican roads; nor did we, at that time.

We had managed to make the trip down with little tire trouble, in spite of the misgivings of the natives, who said we should get six-plys before we left the railroad towns. The treads still looked good; and we were heading for home, full of false confidence, having given those casings a terrible beating over rocky roads that were never meant for anything but burros and carts.

It was a tough place to change a tire, but Howard and I got out and put on the good spare, which we had used only a few times. We also had a spare tube, to save patching, in case of a puncture. We decided that we would buy another tire, as soon as we came to Magdalena, where such things were for sale. We were a bit worried, since we hadn't passed a car all morning; but there was nothing to do but keep going and hope for the best. The long stretch of desert land, dotted here and there by clumps of discouraged-looking cactus, seemed to begin and end nowhere. The red dusty road disappeared ahead in a silvery mirage that looked like a small lake, preceding us at exactly our pace, enveloping brush, cactus, and occasional mesquite trees as it traveled; reflecting the higher tops in its mirrored surface, exactly as if they were

flooded. The red dust came up through the floor boards and into the windows in greater quantities; since we were traveling slower. The wives said they looked a sight; and for once, we were forced to agree with them.

We had traveled perhaps three miles when the second blowout came. We were really in a spot. There was no shade of any sort. The sun was almost directly overhead. This time there was no spare; but we did have a spare tube. We examined the blown-out casings. Both were cut badly on the inside, from going over rocks and stumps of brush in the hill roads. There didn't seem to be much choice. We took the one with the smaller hole, and cut a piece out of the other, to make a boot. This was a heart-breaking slow process, with nothing but a large-bladed pocket knife; but we finally accomplished the apparently impossible. With the tire pumped up and running again, we really traveled slowly, and held our breath at every bump.

Our wonderful repair job ran us five miles, by the speedometer, and blew out again. We both got out and looked dejectedly at the tire; now things were really bad. Still, no one had passed on the road in either direction. Suddenly Howard brightened.

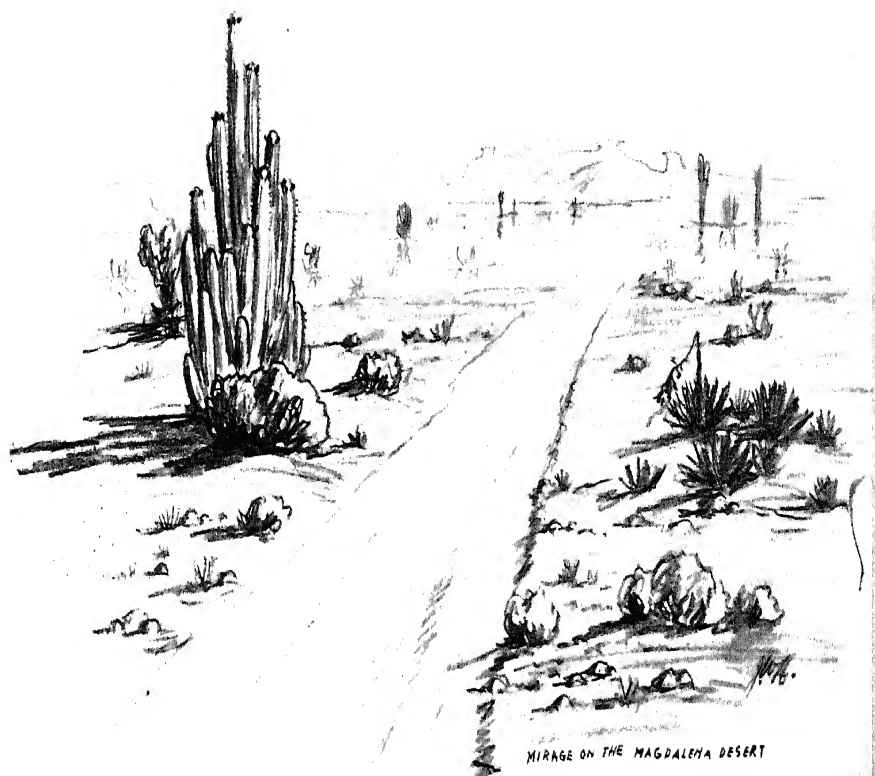
"Look, John, it didn't blow out in our patched spot. If we can only repair one of the tubes, we still have a chance."

Hope springs eternal, even in the breast of an entomologist and an artist. We used up all the patching equipment and part of one tube, in fixing the other; and were just starting on the laborious problem of whittling out another boot, when we saw dust coming down the road behind us. It might be help.

We brushed as much dirt off our clothes as we could, and suddenly became conscious of the fact that neither had shaved that morning. What a sight we must present. Our car was bulging with camping equipment, and everything, including our wives, was covered with red Sonora dust.

"What if they won't stop?" we wondered, and looking ourselves over, decided that we could hardly blame them.

The car did stop, however, and when the cloud of dust sifted away, we found ourselves in the presence of a Mexican General and his driver.



MIRAGE ON THE MAGDALENA DESERT





"You are turistas?" he inquired, seeming not at all to notice our awful appearance.

We told him that Howard was collecting insects, and I was painting pictures.

"Ah," he said, "the paintings I should like so much to see; but of the 'insectos' I have already experienced a sufficiency. But enough, gentlemen! I see that you are in trouble; it is the summer heat, and these so terrible roads. I, General Eguerre, am completely at your service."

We figured, rapidly, how many tires we would need, and the approximate cost. Suddenly we came to the realization that we didn't have that much cash on hand; and we had spent all of our traveler's checks. Explaining our situation to the General, we said we could telephone our customs broker at the border, to okay a personal check for the tires.

"This will not be necessary," he snapped, "my endorsement on your check will make it acceptable; and it will be a pleasure."

Then he turned, smiling, to the car.

"It is very hot and unpleasant, here, in the dust. If the Señoras will be so gracious as to accompany me, there is a hotel where they can refresh themselves and wait until the tires are brought and their car arrives."

The General was calling the shots. It was his party; and we felt that the only graceful thing to do was to agree to his suggestions.

It was with some misgivings, however, that we saw him disappear through the glittering mirage ahead, with our wives and a signed blank check on the First National Bank of Coachella, California.

About two hours later, a car came roaring back from the other direction. It contained our tires and two soldiers, who insisted that they were under orders to mount the tires, and that we were not to help. They knew their stuff; the tires were soon on, and we were rolling merrily along the road which miraculously became better in a few miles. For the first time in weeks, we were actually doing forty miles an hour.

We found the girls at the hotel. They had been shown a room

where they could take real baths, and didn't even resemble the wives we had so recently parted from. The General, they informed us, had rushed on to the border to keep an appointment, but left his telephone number in Nogales; and asked that we call and let him know how we made out, regardless of the hour.

The hotel owner refused payment for the use of the room, since we were not sleeping in the beds; and assured us it was a pleasure to be of service to "friends of the General." That night we stopped in a hotel on the Mexican side of the border. The customs had closed. We called; and the General asked if it would be too much trouble to see the paintings I had made on the trip. We assured him that it would be a pleasure, and after cleaning up, and eating an excellent dinner, we presented ourselves at his hotel. Several other officers were present. After very formal introductions, they began setting up my unframed paintings, around the room, on various pieces of furniture. Their appreciation—like that of almost every Mexican I met—was flowery, but apparently genuine.

There was a sudden exclamation from the General, as he took another oil sketch from the stack and held it up for everyone to see.

"That you look well at this picture, compadres, I beg of you. It is in this town that I was born, near this very spot. It is a miracle! There is the sierra that reflects the morning light, and those uvalama trees that I played under, as a boy. And look! The tower of the church, on the left over that building—*que perfecta, que bonita!*"

I had hoped that the General might admire one of the pictures more than the rest, but this was more luck than I had expected. Naturally, I gave it to him. He protested; but I assured him that it was the happiest kind of a coincidence, and I would not feel right if he did not accept it as a token of my esteem and gratitude.

He called up some other friends, and ordered a couple of pitchers of beer. We sat in the then crowded room and talked, as the new arrivals looked over the paintings and admired the General's gift.

Howard mentioned the fact that he did not believe that a General of the United States Army, in a hurry to reach an appointment, would have stopped and offered such aid to Mexican tourists

on our highways; especially if the strangers were as dirty as we had been. The General expostulated:

"But my friends, the dirt was Mexican dirt; and the cause was the Mexican roads. In your country, on your fine highways, such a thing would not befall a Mexican tourist. It was no more than my responsibility, as a good citizen, to offer the aid. Some day my land will have roads like yours; but that day can only come if people like yourselves continue to travel what roads we now have. My people must first see the need of good roads, before they can be built; and you, my friends, are the pioneers so necessary to make all this possible."

Then he launched into the proposed plans for the west coast highway, which in a few years would make us more fully the good neighbors that we should be. We were a contented and happy lot that night.

The next morning we were first in line, when the Mexican customs opened. Our car was loaded with all sorts of things; insect collections, plant materials, tree seeds, paintings, and camping equipment. Everything would have to be gone over and checked. We figured it would take till noon to reach the American flag we could see, less than a block away, across the steel fence. We had all the necessary permits and papers handy, when the inspector stepped up. He started looking them over, while another started to open the door. The cargador we had engaged to handle the baggage took out the first suitcase. Suddenly, the chief inspector bustled up.

"Un momento, Señores! Are you the artist? and you Señor, the collector of the bugs? Ah! it is good that I arrived. It will not be necessary to remove anything from the car. I am assured that all is in order. It will take but a little moment to sign the papers." He drew a fountain pen from his shirt pocket, with a flourish. "Sign here, on the tourist cards that you turn in," he indicated. "Now I sign your permits thus," he continued, "and you are on your way. Pasen ustedes y vayan con Dios."

We shall never forget General Eguerre.

## *Don't Photograph Drunks*

A SKETCH of a group of men in white clothes and hats in front of a cantina in Navajoa reminds me of the day I was arrested and taken to police headquarters.

I was visiting my friends, Fred Dow, Jr., and his charming wife. Every afternoon I would wander about town with my sketch-book and camera, looking for likely subjects. I noticed one particular policeman watching, narrowly, whenever I set up the tripod to take a picture; but I thought nothing of it. I had been tapped gently on the shoulder with the quiet warning of "Se prohíbe," when about to take a picture in other places and at other times. I thought I had a rather complete list of the prohibited subjects, and tried to avoid photographing anything that would cause concern.

Late that afternoon I turned a street corner and found a crowd of men all dressed in white trousers, shirts, and hats, listening to a small orchestra just inside the doorway of a cantina. The figures all had their backs to me, and the pattern of hats and bodies pleased me. I unfolded the tripod and set the camera up on the sidewalk, and was just in the act of squinting through the view-finder, when the strong arm of the law in the form of the suspicious cop forcibly pulled me from my camera. The policeman informed me I was under arrest, and must accompany him, pronto, to the police station. I folded my equipment and asked what the reason was, and he said, "For photographing drunks." I tried to call his attention to the fact that they all had their faces turned the other way, and no one could possibly tell by the expression of their shoulders and backs whether they were drunk or sober, since they were all stand-

# CANTINA

CERVEZA  
CARTA BLANCA





ing erect. He countered that it was bad enough to take photos of drunks in the first place, but doubly so to do it when their backs were turned and they couldn't defend themselves.

Our argument had collected a considerable crowd by then, and I could see that the cop was all for baiting me to the point where some really drunken member of the assemblage would take matters into his own hands; so I decided that the best thing to do was to go meekly along and present my arguments to someone higher up, and less fanatical on the subject.

I kept very still until we entered the police station and I was ushered past the chief's office to a waiting bench. Then I set up a loud harangue about being insulted in the streets, by policemen; and the international consequences of such treatment to visitors, who come in good faith and well recommended by officials of the Mexican government itself. The outbreak came so suddenly and unexpectedly to the cop, that he had no time to tell his story.

The chief of police called that I be brought in and air my grievance to him. I started right in by blaming this ignorant fellow for spoiling a true work of art, and got warmed up to the subject in great fashion. The chief agreed with me that no one could tell by the backs of a crowd the degree of inebriation, so long as they were standing.

While I had him coming my way, I whipped out a letter of introduction from Adolfo de la Huerta, of the consular service. The chief read the letter. It was a good one. I had never used it before, because the flowery descriptions of my virtues and accomplishments were embarrassing to me; but it was just the thing for this occasion. The chief put on stern-looking, steel-rimmed spectacles and, frowning over them for an instant at the now very crestfallen cop, dashed off a "noticio" to be placed on the bulletin board, and handed it to my oppressor, to post. Then he rose and shook hands, and invited me to join him in a drink at the bar around the corner. The notice read:

"To all whom it may concern: The Señor, John W. Hilton of Thermal, California, United States of America, is honoring this town and district with his presence for a short while. He is an artist, writer, and student of natural history, and has been highly

recommended to me as a man who is doing all in his power to promote good relations between our country and his. He is not to be molested while taking photos, or making sketches, as he is a much better judge of the artistic merit of a subject than any member of my police force."

I was never bothered again in Navajoa.



## *In Alamos with the Family*

**M**Y SKETCHES of the Spanish colonial town of Alamos—the plaza empty of traffic, the ruined walls and old street lamps, the byways, and the high cool interior of the church—remind me of many happy experiences; but none were happier than the months that I spent with my family in this charming place, where time stands still and friends have leisure for happy association.

The first time I rode into the sleeping town of Alamos, late at night, and looked at the plaza palms and the cathedral in the moonlight, I had a strange sense of having come home. There is a certain vague feeling of familiarity about the spot that has alternately troubled and comforted me. I do not presume to offer any explanations, but that has always been the way I felt about Alamos, and I suppose it shall be, to the end.

So many of the things that pleased us would probably sound like trifles in print. I find it hard to pick out of the sheaf of memories those things which will best portray to others who have never seen the town the subtle quality of the place that manages to take hold of the hearts of most of its visitors.

The first time we came to town, we took a room in the old Alamos hotel. The place was built on a grand scale, as many colonial buildings were; but here the architect had really let himself go. Gigantic arches and sweeping stairways, balconies on all rooms looking out over the town; it was a place to take your breath away. Our room was bare when we were shown into it. We were informed that the room rent would be a peso per day. Each additional piece of furniture would be a few centavos extra. It was a time-honored custom. We asked for beds, and they were produced

—the wide canvas cots used all through the warm part of Mexico. They looked pretty uncomfortable, but we soon discovered that they were the only thing for the summer. An ordinary mattress was smothering in its effect. A piece at a time, the other furniture was brought in, a dresser, four chairs, a small table for a typewriter, a washbowl with a pot to match; and in no time, the room had been furnished to order. The clerk had stood by, itemizing the charges, and when the room suited us, he informed us it would cost us two pesos and thirty-five cents per day (this amounted to a bit under fifty cents American money).

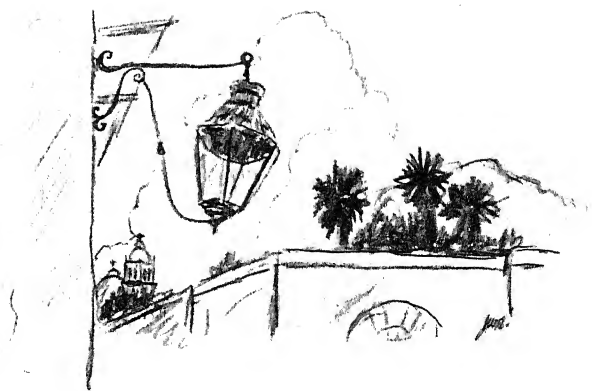
Such was our introduction to the town, and in spite of very sketchy sanitary facilities, we were comfortable in that old hotel. Later we took a house in the town (a simple affair of twelve rooms) and had the time of our lives camping out in its faded grandeur; but on our third visit we had made a good many friends and found out how to get the most out of our time, by staying as paying guests in a private home.

It was to the home of Fred Dow and his wonderful wife that I took my family. Friends in the States were horrified when they heard we were planning on taking our two-year-old girl into the "wilds of Mexico." It was all right if my wife and I wanted to risk our health and hides, but taking children into such a place was another matter. I wish that some of these horrified, if well meaning, friends could have watched our little Katherine through one of her routine days in Alamos. I am sure they would have altered their opinions considerably.

Katherine loved the market place, which was just a block down the alameda from our front door. She insisted on tripping gayly along while I went down to buy fresh rolls and fruit for breakfast. She enjoyed the shouting banter of the vendors, as we passed their stalls, and shouted back in her English, to their Spanish. Neither understood the other's words, but the meaning was always clear. By the time I was ready to leave, she would be loaded down with little gifts: a bedraggled and very green peach, a bright-colored parrot feather, a handful of flowers, and possibly a couple of pungent guavas. It wasn't long before everyone on the street, between our house and the market, knew the "little American" girl









with the curls." They all called to her as they passed, and she answered with her cheery "Adios," which passes for a combination hello and good-by in Mexico.

Another of her friends was the old beggar who smelled like violets. After breakfast she would insist on walking with me to the post office in the plaza, and her principal stop on the trek was to give the daily dime to our favorite beggar. The old woman would always mumble a blessing to the little girl, as she stood on tiptoe to drop the coin from her chubby palm into the bony outstretched hand. I can see the two, yet; the beggar standing just inside the shade of the high wall behind her and the spot of sun striking the child's curly head. The contrast was something to remember.

There were little neighbor girls to play with in the block, and Katherine loved them all. She managed to pick up about a dozen words of Spanish, and the little playmates may have absorbed about an equal amount of English; but they got on famously. There must be some bond between children that makes them understand each other, regardless of nationality or language.

She soon learned to take her siesta when the others did, and I think it was particularly good for her. (We never could get her to take a nap at home.) She ate three good meals a day and was never sick an hour, all the time she was in Alamos or at the ranch in the back country. Water and food were unquestionably good, in both places; and we took ordinary precautions while traveling in areas where these were suspected or doubtful. Such were a two-year-old's hardships in Sonora.

The whole family used to enjoy just sitting in the plaza in the afternoon, watching the farmer boys come into town with their assorted burro loads of produce. Some of the loads those burros carried were astounding. Firewood was the commonest commodity. Little heat is ever used in Alamos houses, even in the winter, but all of the cooking is done over open fires. Tanbark was another commodity that came through the plaza by the burro train. The bales of reddish bark nearly smothered the little donkey, leaving just enough free space for the beasts to see, and occasionally catch a breath of air. Their sandal-shod drivers followed along behind, nudging with a stick the rearmost animal, when he stopped to take

a bite of grass which grew up between the cobblestones. Loads of green corn were probably the most picturesque, for they were almost invariably decorated with bright-colored squash which hung over the top of the load. Sonorans never go into a cornfield and simply pick roasting ears, as we do. They know that the hot dry air will soon rob the green corn of all its flavor, if it is handled in this way. Their system is to cut the whole stalk, with the ears attached, and load it with others into a great bundle on the back of a donkey. There is a double purpose in this. After the corn is delivered in its freshest possible state, the stalks are sold for fodder, which is always in demand.

One afternoon we saw a tragic, yet comic thing. A burro broke the sacred municipal law of Alamos and wandered unattended into the plaza. The policeman, who was standing idly, talking to the girl in a limeade stand, looked up and saw the intruder. He glanced about rather importantly to see if he had an audience, hitched up his belt, and walked over to the lost "jackass." I could hardly believe my ears when he placed one hand on the animal's mane and rattled off the old Spanish salutation used when arresting a person in the name of the law. Everything was handled with due solemnity. The officer took out his notebook and wrote down the time and place of the arrest. What he entered as the burro's name I shall never know, but he did lead the culprit away and locked him up in the city jail at the top of the hill. There the poor lost donkey kept all the inmates holding their ears, as he brayed forth his fear and misery to the world at large. A few minutes later a small boy came running into the plaza, inquiring about his burro. He had tied him outside a house, while he carried a load of firewood into the kitchen, and somehow the curious animal had pulled loose and gone "exploring." Bystanders lost no time in giving the poor lad the picture of what had happened, to the accompaniment of considerable laughter at the child's expense. I don't think I ever saw a small boy who wanted harder to cry, but didn't. If he had, he would never have been able to face the crowd in the plaza again.

About half an hour later, he came back down the hill with his beast of burden. Both of them looked pretty forlorn. I imagine the "fine" just about covered what the boy had made on his load of



wood. Mexican justice has the ability of making things of this sort come out even. Folks in the plaza laughed, again, as they saw the lad, and agreed among themselves that here was one burro that would be securely tied when he visited Alamos.

The church was a never-ending source of pleasure to us all. We are not a particularly religious family, but there was something about that old cathedral and its vaulted coolness in the afternoon that brought peace and quiet to our hearts, like nothing else. There is a simple majesty about the old colonial structure that can hardly be matched by the tiled and jeweled show places, so favored in Mexico by natives and tourists alike. When one looks up at its lone tower, he feels the weight of each gigantic hand-hewn block of stone, and realizes what an enormous "labor of love" went into its building. There would have been another tower, but times changed, and it was never finished.

The youngsters used to love the climb up the dark narrow stairway, out onto the roof and the tower itself. The big bells, that gave off a musical note to the light touch of a finger, fascinated them. Philip used to enjoy standing in the tower and looking down into the patios of the surrounding houses, picking out the places where he had been. One day a young engineer, visiting from the south, accompanied us on a tour of the church, and he called our attention to a thing that we had missed. High up in the tower were some inlays that sparkled in the sun every afternoon. I had thought that they were just a few glazed tiles, set in for the general effect, but this young Mexican engineer was an authority on Spanish colonial churches. He told us that these decorations were in reality china plates. In the very early days of church-building in Mexico, such things as glazed tiles were out of the question. Many of the highly decorated churches of today received this gaudy coating long years after the main structure was finished. In place of tiles, each lady of the town (she was no lady if she didn't possess one) brought a plate from her favorite set of china, to be set in the tower. It is hard to imagine a more genuine offering than the breaking up of the set of china that had been so carefully brought around the Horn from old Spain; especially, since most of those sets of plates were heirlooms before they left the Old World. After

that, we never looked up at the shining white disks in the church tower without thinking of the pioneer Spanish women of Alamos and their devotion.

Sometimes in the evening we called on friends and took the whole family, as is the custom. Children are allowed to sit up late with their elders, on such occasions, and probably make up for it by a longer siesta the next afternoon. Music and conversation took up all the time, and we were never bored for a moment, nor could we see any signs of boredom in our hosts or the other guests. It never seemed necessary to play bridge or have other artificial forms of entertainment, to pass the time. The exchange of ideas, a little music, and maybe a little dancing, were enough.

These parties were never formal or premeditated. A small boy would come by in the late afternoon and inform us that Louisa's cousin was visiting from Los Mochis and she would like to have us all over to meet him. By the time we arrived, someone would be playing Louisa's old Steinway grand. It had been shipped by some ancestor around the Horn, and was as mellow and sweet as a harp. It had lost almost a full step in pitch, but was still in tune with itself. There are several other fine Old World Steinways in Alamos, and in each case they are still in good shape, and form the nucleus of a party in the home of their lucky possessor. I liked Louisa's parlor. The hand-painted lampshade mounted on a small bronze statue diffused the light of the "Aladdin kerosene lamp," casting here and there a high light on a gilded frame of a family portrait, or a glitter on a piece of cut glass. It was a room full of memories. Even when the whole assemblage was singing its loudest, there was a feeling that bridged the gap between now and yesterday. The aura of other days and other people filled the room like the presence of additional guests.

I never managed to make a complete inventory of the objects in that room, but it was a pleasure to try. One evening my eye was caught by a large decorative piece of china, sitting on the floor at the corner of the piano. I had never noticed it before, and looked at it this time for several seconds before I realized that it was perhaps the most elaborately hand-painted spittoon I had ever seen. Apparently some of the players of the grand piano in the gay nine-

ties were gentlemen who chewed tobacco; a habit not prevalent in Alamos now.

These evenings would pass before we knew it. Someone would sing a solo or two; we would talk of this or that. Someone else would play a violin or one of the children would be asked by a proud parent to recite, with gestures and rolling of the eyes, some Spanish poem of bitter disappointment and tragic love. Now and then a lively tune on the piano would bring a few couples to the floor in an impromptu dance. It was all so natural and unplanned, so completely enjoyable, that we never wanted to go home. I took a young American acquaintance to one of these parties in Alamos and when we got back to the house he said he had been "bored stiff," and that such entertainment was "too corny for words." Needless to say, I never took him anywhere again.

The weekly movie show held in the Palacio Municipal, was a great social event in Alamos. The day before, a truck would travel up one street and down the other with a bass drum and a couple of musical instruments, to attract as much attention as possible. Hand-painted banners screaming the actors' names and the title of the show decorated both sides of the truck; and a sort of barker, with a megaphone, would harangue each crowd they collected on the dare-devil feats of the great "Hoot Geebson" or the romantic tragedy of "La Garbo." I found some of these verbal prologues more interesting than the pictures themselves, and I am sure the actors and the producers would have gotten a surprise, could they have listened.

Philip, who was thirteen, met a young girl his age who had gone to school in the States. She could talk English much better than he could flounder with his Spanish, so he liked to sit and talk, by the hour, on her front porch. It was the sort of thing that kids back home have been doing for years, and no one places any particular importance on it. Down there, everyone smiled and nodded and said what a cute couple they were. Not realizing what he was getting himself into, Philip asked the girl if she would like to go to the movie, one night. The girl looked pleased, but surprised; and asked her mother, who spoke very good English. The mother explained that it would be all right for them to go to the moving picture, but

they must take a chaperone along. This more or less floored Philip, who was used to the casual way kids got together to see a movie back home; but he had started something, and he was determined to finish it. When he announced the fact at the supper table, Mr. Dow said that he had better listen to his "Uncle Fred" for a while, so that he could brush up on all the etiquette involved. There was no use offending the girl, her mother, or the interested neighborhood. The next night I got the shock of my life. Philip was dressed in white, from top to toes, and carrying two roses—one for the girl and the other for the chaperone. When I remarked that he even had his hair combed, he left me with the one expressive comment, "Nuts!"

The trio walked by a few minutes later, and I tried to keep my face straight, as all three solemnly chorused "Adios." The chaperone that Philip had been dreading was the daughter of the "Presidente" of Alamos, one of the prettiest girls in town. Philip wasn't doing so badly! After that, he never missed a chance to take the two girls to a show, or walk them around the plaza, of an evening; and he always combed his hair and carried two roses, much to his mother's pleasure and my astonishment.

Residents of Alamos are tellers of tales. It is a pleasure to sit and listen to the rich lore surrounding this historical town. One story of Alamos has been told so often that it has found its way into American print, both in its original form and in garbled versions, hardly recognizable as the same story.

The old lady who told it to me was a direct descendant of one of the principals, and she says that when she was a child, she used to sit on piles of silver bars in the house, instead of chairs. This was the safest place for the bullion, until it could be freighted to the coast. They simply made silver bars into low benches and padded them with Mayo rugs.

The story is more than a legend. It happened! The founder of the present Almada family, in Alamos, was ready for the wedding of his oldest daughter. A sudden rain had wet the streets and, though the sun was shining again, the bride-to-be complained that she would wet her lovely shoes, walking across to the church. Her father called the servants and, with a grand gesture, told them to

lay a path of silver bars across the street so the wedding parade could get to the church dry-shod. It wasn't a planned display of wealth, merely a spontaneous gesture that could have happened no place else but Alamos. It caught people's imaginations, and was retold with so many variations that it is considered a legend, by many; but I am convinced that the story, as I have put it down, is basically true. There are at least a dozen other stories, in Mexico, of paving streets with silver, which can be traced back to the famous Almada gesture.

Sometimes on Sundays the neighbors would pile into trucks and cars and drive gayly down the arroyo, called Cuchuhaqui. Here, by the rushing water, under the giant cypress trees, they would hold a picnic. The children went in swimming; everyone else sat around and talked; and a fine wholesome good time was had by all. Even here, the people, young and old, found plenty to occupy their time without organizing any of the artificial games so prevalent at one of our picnics. One pretty sight was the way the girls of the crowd gathered wild flowers and put them in their hair. One flower, in particular, was striking against black tresses. It was called, locally, "casca la suchu," and is actually a close relative of the frangipani.

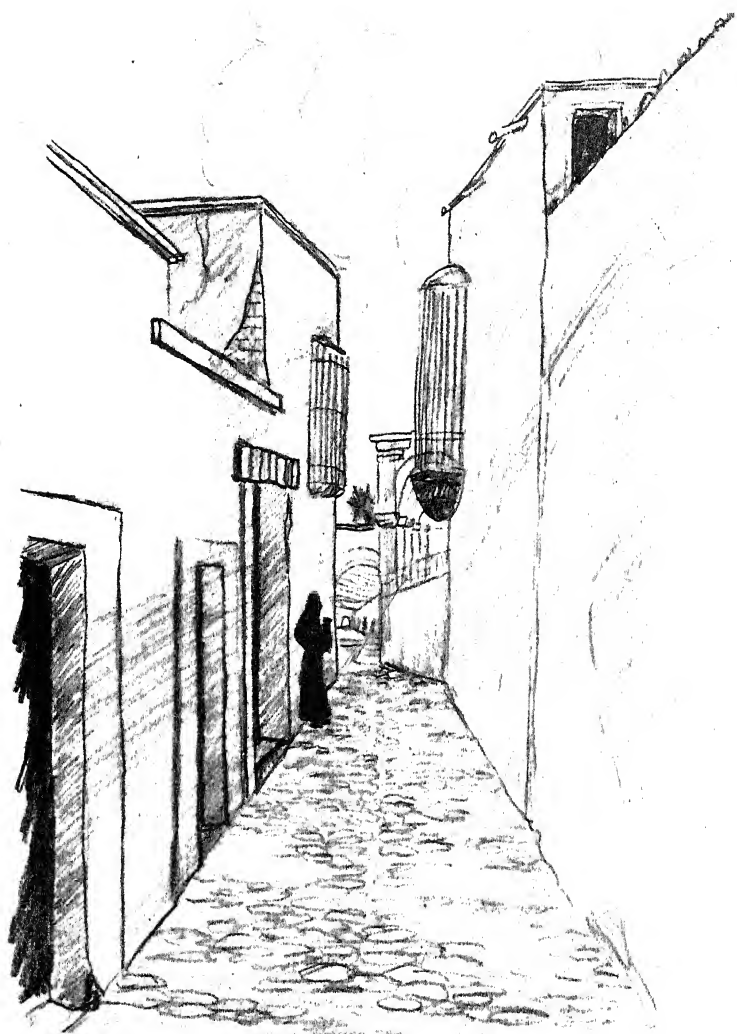
Sometimes we would climb the steep hill in the center of town, and visit the jail. This was a popular spot for Sunday afternoon walks, by the townspeople. The view was magnificent, with Alamos spreading out below and the high ramparts of the mountain beyond. The gates to the jail were seldom closed on Sundays, for relatives and friends were visiting. The prisoners were allowed to walk around the little park, surrounding the jail, or sit on a bench and talk with their best girls. Everything was strictly informal.

One afternoon when we came down from the hill, the dusty climb had made us hot and tired. The cool dark door of the cathedral looked inviting, so we entered and, to our surprise, we were greeted with organ music. The church was empty, save one mother and child—praying in front of the statue of the Virgin; but the walls vibrated with the sound of a really well played organ concerto. There were no pipes visible, nor had we ever heard of an organ in the church. The whole thing had us pleased, but puzzled.

The sound seemed to roll forth from the arched domes overhead, with no actual focal point. I was amazed by the acoustic properties of the place. Finally we could stand the suspense no longer, and began making a quiet search of the church to locate the source of the music. It would have taken little then to have made us believe in a miracle: an organ so fine and an organist able to play such a concerto! We tiptoed from place to place, but everywhere we went, the sound came from someplace else. The one thing that we agreed on was the fact that it seemed to emanate from above. As a last resort, we climbed the dark stairs leading to the tower. Halfway up, we found a door that we had always missed in the darkness, because it was usually closed. A dim light came through this opening, as did the music of the organ. We stepped quietly through and saw a very old lady in a black dress and black mantilla, seated at an old-fashioned parlor organ, playing great music while she pumped the instrument with her tired feet. It sounds impossible that the music of such an instrument could assume grand proportions, but the acoustics of that church (or perhaps the miracle we had expected) produced an effect comparable to any organ music I have ever heard. We found out later that this old lady was fulfilling a vow to play once a month in the church. We wondered why the whole town wasn't there to hear her.

At the beginning of this chapter, I mentioned the fact that some of the things we liked most about Alamos were so simple, and to some people insignificant, that it is hard to impress our feelings about them on others. One of these simple commonplace things was the way the folks would sit in front of their houses at night. Chairs would be brought out and, as the sunset lit up the old walls and tree trunks around the Alameda, we would sit and chat or just watch the quiet end of day. When some neighbor passed, he would say "Adios," to be answered by a chorus of the same word, from us. When I think of Alamos, my mind goes back to the evenings when our family sat out on the sidewalk with the Dows, answering "Adios" to our passing friends, drinking in the peace and contentment of the moment.







## *The Beggar Who Smelled Like Violets*

WHEN I turn to my sketch of the "Callejon" in Alamos, a great many things come back to my mind; the trains of donkeys loaded with wood, tanbark, or papayas, coming into the market through this narrow street; the women going down to the river to wash, with heavy bundles on their heads; the soft pad of countless sandaled feet on the time-polished cobblestones. I remember, too, how harsh our own shoes sounded, echoing from the high walls—an alien sound.

The Callejon has character and color. An old statute on the books in the city hall bans any form of wheeled traffic on this block-long street. That law has never been broken in two hundred years. This narrow street connects the main plaza with the market and the Alameda. At least half of the town walks through it every day.

I remember, on fiesta days, when one could hardly make headway through its throngs; and at siesta time, when the only occupants were sleeping mozos, lying lengthways with the street as near to the shade-giving wall as possible. I even remember, on moonlit nights, its dark mysterious walls, the uneven cobbles underfoot, the glint of moonlight reflected from a broken pane of glass in the long-unused wrought-iron street light that hangs from its rusty bracket (a temptation to every passing antique collector).

Yes, the Callejon holds many pleasant memories for me, but outstanding among them all is its only beggar—the one who smelled like violets!

On our first trip to Alamos we parked our car in the plaza and walked through the Callejon to the market. We had no sooner

entered the shade of the stone walls than my wife noticed the odor of violets. It was morning. Many people of both sexes were passing through the street. I saw nothing unusual about violet perfume. I had become conscious of strong perfume in a Mexican crowd before. My wife, however, knows perfumes, and she kept right on talking about it.

"That was either the smell of fresh violets or a very expensive perfume that you wouldn't expect to find on this street," she insisted.

About an hour later we passed back through the same street, and just before we emerged into the plaza, my wife stopped and sniffed the air.

"There's that perfume again."

She was right. There was an unmistakable odor of violets.

We looked around us furtively. A huge fat lady stood in the middle of the street, discussing the weather with a neighbor. Two small boys came by, pulling a small pig at the end of a rope. The pig was unhappy about the proceedings. His squealing left no one in doubt about the matter. It couldn't be emanating from any of these. The only other occupant of the street, a tall old woman dressed in black who looked like a witch, held out her hand to passers-by and mumbled the same formula over and over again, "Una socorrita por Dios." It certainly couldn't be coming from that old beggar who asked for "a little alms for God's sake." We decided that it must be coming from one of the high barred windows in the wall above us.

The next morning, on the way to the market, the same odor was in the Callejon, and I decided to see whether it could possibly be coming from the old beggar in black. I took a ten-cent piece out of my pocket and, as we came back through the narrow street, I stopped as near to her as I could, while I placed it in her outstretched hand. I had found the source. She smelled like a meadow in spring.

The next day I dropped another dime in her hand, and after her "Gracias," I attempted to enter into a conversation with her. I might just as well have tried small talk with a Hollywood butler. She looked right through me.

The beggar who smelled like violets became an obsession with us. We inquired about her, and found the only two facts anyone seemed to know or care about: "She is very old, and she lost her money in the revolution." No one seemed to be able to enlighten us on which revolution, or any other details.

"Pues, what does it matter which revolution? A revolution is a revolution. Now she is a beggar, and since she was once rich, she is an honorable beggar."

Her status seemed different from that of other beggars in the town, who were allowed to go on the streets only one day in the week; parading from door to door. Any householder who did not give them a copper two-cent piece was considered a social outlaw. One of our neighbors explained the matter.

"You see, she gives something in return. Every day during the siesta hour, and each night before she goes to bed, she stops at the Cathedral and there says a prayer or prayers for those who have given her alms. She has a regular rate, and prays longer for a silver piece than for a copper cent, but everyone gets his money's worth, for she is very honorable."

After that, I always felt a little uncomfortable when I dropped a coin in her hand. I knew she appreciated the silver, and that most of her contributions were coppers, but I couldn't relish the idea of someone doing all that praying for me.

From time to time, I would attempt to say something when I gave her the daily ten-cent piece, but I might as well have addressed the stone wall behind her.

It was several years later, on another trip, that I finally found out about her. I had hardly gotten my things unpacked when I had an urge to walk through the Callejon and see whether the old beggar was still there. She was, and she still smelled of violets. I was prepared to try something new. I handed her five pesos, all at once.

"I have been away a long time," I said. "How does it go with you?" Her old eyes glowed. She glanced quickly up and down the street; no one was in sight, it was a dull day.

"God is good to me, Señor," she answered, fingering the coins. "I hope that the saints have answered my prayers, and your voyages

were successful and full of happiness. And how is the Señora? Is she with you again?"

I told her that I had brought my wife, and my son, and baby daughter. That I wanted her to meet them. She seemed suddenly to freeze.

"Oh, no, Señor, do not introduce them to me. It is not 'costumbre' to introduce the 'gente' to beggars, but please do bring them by; I want to see them as they pass."

Someone was coming up the street.

"Con permiso," she mumbled, and backed away, assuming her habitual posture against the wall. I suddenly realized that I had forced her out of character, and that probably for the first time in years she had talked to someone of the "gente" as if she were an equal human being.

The street was empty again. "Adios," I said, "I will bring the family past tomorrow."

"Mil gracias," she replied, "I shall say many prayers."

I had forgotten how much kneeling five pesos would represent to this old lady, in my desire to do something nice for her.

"Please, Señora," I begged, "the five pesos are for prayers you have already said, and which have been answered."

She smiled and seemed to understand, but someone was coming up the street, and she assumed the same stern posture of face and figure that had first reminded us of a halloween decoration.

After that, I managed to see her at times when there was little travel in the street. When no one else was listening, she talked. In fact, she was starved for someone to talk to. Bit by bit, her former life unfolded, a few sentences at a time, between passing pedestrians.

Sometimes I would have Katherine along. The child had grown to like the old lady very much, and insisted on being the one to hand her the daily dime. Some sixth sense in her drew her to the old lady, whose appearance would normally send an American child of that age into hysterical flight. Sometimes, when no one was looking, the old lady would reach down and touch the top of her curly head.

"Que bonita" (how beautiful), she would say, "and so wise for

her years. She understands everything. Mark my words, Señor, she is one of the 'old ones.' But look at the eyes."

I asked what she meant by this, and discovered a very interesting if unorthodox belief that is quite commonly held in Mexico.

"Here, Señor, we believe that sometimes in Heaven there are not enough new souls to go round for all of the babies being born. When such is the case, the angels pick out some of the souls that were taken in the prime of life, by accident or the plague, and send them down to make the earth a better place. They are easily told, Señor. There is a look in the eyes, even when they are very young, and an understanding beyond their years. They say things that surprise people—things that they could not have learned in this life. You will see, Señor, that I am right."

Then came the day when I started my painting of the Callejon. The old lady had politely refused to be photographed, but she had no scruples about being sketched, and would pass behind the easel once in a while to see how the picture was coming. If no one was in the street, she would stop and chat. It was on one of these occasions that I finally summoned the nerve to ask about the violet perfume. She didn't seem to resent it. The street was empty.

"I have already told you, Señor, that my husband was French. His people came to Mexico with Maximiliano—a fine man, a good business man, and a musician. My father owned a silver mine. I was born in that great house, over there, when it was filled with many riches, and all of the luxuries that money could buy. The perfume, Señor, was a large bottle—part of my husband's wedding gift. It was his favorite scent, and was packed in the great chest containing my wedding dress and jewels, which he furnished according to the custom. He said, at the time, that the perfume was very strong and good, from his native France; that it would be enough for the rest of my life. In a few months, he was killed in the revolution; then my father and brothers. Everything was gone. I sold the jewels, one by one; finally, even the chest and dress in which I was married. But one must retain something, Señor. I am very old, now, and the bottle is almost empty."

## *Ride to Jim's Mine*

A PAGE of sketches of a strange and interesting wild fig, oddly enough, calls to my memory a trip I took to examine a gold mine. I found other things equally interesting.

It all started when I decided to go down into Sinaloa on horseback to meet Mac's brother, Jim, at his mine near Limon. I had heard of the proposition, and wanted to sample it for a friend who was thinking of investing some money. This was to be my first long trip into the Sierra without the company of some other American, and I looked forward to it with mingled feelings of eagerness and apprehension.

Mac had loaned me his own riding stallion, and I had my things boiled down to the barest necessities that could be transported in saddle bags. The mozo, engaged for the morrow, knew the trail and would walk or trot ahead of me the whole distance, and take care of my horse when we stopped.

That afternoon, a very fat and sweaty Mexican engineer rode into the ranch on a ragged, underfed-looking horse he had rented in Alamos. He had been making some surveys, and was on his way back by the ranch; so stopped in for the well known hospitality of the McCarthy household. He was taken in as a matter of course. As they led his lathered and winded mount to the barn Mac remarked to me that he would sure hate to have that fellow ride a horse of his. When I met him on the porch I found him full of a superficial affability, and possessing a handshake like a long-dead fish. I took an instant dislike to the man. Up to that time I had met no other Mexicans (except a couple of overfed petty politicians, in border offices), for whom I had felt an active aversion. All

through dinner we were regaled by tales of his great "pull" in the capital, and the various generals and high-ranking officials who were his "muy amigos."

Mac told him he needed some help in a quarrel over water rights, and he immediately promised to write a personal letter to the Governor of the state and settle the matter once and for all. I felt a little better about the man, after this; and really felt sorry for him when they passed him the jelly, and he thought it was dessert; promptly eating the whole dish before looking up to see that it was the only one.

The guest turned in early, saying that he must start out "muy temprana por la mañana," and I followed his example, as I had to get up in the "little morning" myself. I went out to check up, first, on how my mount was faring, and to see that the engineer's poor horse had plenty of fodder to fortify him for the trials of the morrow.

It seemed that I had hardly fallen asleep when I heard a heated conversation between my mozo and Mac, right outside my window. Something was definitely wrong. I went out in the yard to find that my horse was gone. The help were all testifying that he had been securely tied, and the gate shut. I substantiated their statement; for I had inspected things the very last moment before going to bed. Here was a mystery indeed. The engineer's rented horse was still contentedly munching fodder as though nothing had happened. Then a sudden light dawned, and we looked in the engineer's room—it was empty! The mystery was solved; but not my problem. The engineer had evidently risen early, and, by a well planned "mistake," had taken a better horse of entirely different markings and sex, and was long gone for Alamos on a fresh mount.

I wanted to get into the car and head him off by road; but Mac said that it would only cause trouble, that the fellow would probably return the horse by a mozo when he boarded the bus in Alamos, with a note of profuse and flowery apology which would have to be accepted as the gospel truth, or cause more trouble politically for the ranch.

They had to go out and catch another horse and shoe one of

its front hoofs, before I could get started. This didn't take anywhere near so long as I had feared, and soon after breakfast we were merrily on our way to the south; José, walking or trotting ahead in the trail, swinging his machete at protruding branches, and I, bringing up the rear on my steed, as a gentleman should, in these parts.

The country was mostly thorn forest, at first, punctuated by tall giant cacti, and relieved occasionally by the cleared fields or "milpas" of the agrarians. Then we started to travel down a great arroyo, and the scenery turned richly tropical—especially where the walls of the canyon came close together to offer protection. Here, desert forms were almost obliterated, or, if they persisted, they tried to imitate the tropical plants. I actually saw a species of opuntia (prickly-pear cactus) growing on the limbs of a tree, along with orchids and tillandsias.

Succulent plants and ferns clung to the damp walls of rock on both sides of the path in a profusion that would have been the envy of any greenhouse in the States. Here and there were strange ficus trees, perched precariously on the cliffs, and sending long twisted roots as much as two hundred feet down over the rocks to the damp soil in the bottom of the canyon. The startling thing about these plants was not their weirdly gnarled trunks nor the tentaclelike roots and glossy leaves, but the fact that all the bark, every trunk, twig, and exposed root, was a bright, unnatural, pale green, as if it had been freshly painted with a high-gloss varnish. In the bed of the arroyo the dominant trees were the giant Mexican cypress, with a bark having somewhat the texture and color of a redwood, and roots that grasped the rocky bottom like tentacles of a gigantic octopus. Where a spot of sunlight filtered through, we came upon a group of little boys who had been in swimming, stretched out to sun themselves on the twisted cypress roots. Their bare, brown bodies glittered in the light and were reflected in the dark pool below. They slid off into the water like turtles off a log, when they saw that I was a stranger.

In the next valley we paused under some rough-barked trees that looked like huge mesquites, while the mozo gathered some strange fruit for me. They looked like very large, misshapen pods.







When opened, each pod contained a row of black seeds that were wrapped in a cottony white mass, which was the edible portion of the fruit. This tasted starchy, somewhat like a raw potato, but with a sweetness similar to a very crisp apple. The flavor, after one became used to it, was far from unpleasant; and I could well understand how the natives get a great deal of nourishment out of this odd bean, when it is in season. My guide volunteered the information that they gathered the beans, shelled out the fruity portions and dried them in the sun for future use.

A little farther on I heard a childish giggle and looked up to see the giant tree, overhead, literally alive with a bunch of girls, who were gathering the "guamuchil," as they called it. Some trees, they told me, had bitter fruit like some desert mesquites, but this tree was "dulce," and therefore worth a short walk from their little village. When we arrived at their village, around the bend, we saw other girls and women, in almost every dooryard, shelling and drying the fruits. An elderly man stepped out from a thatched hut and extended his hand in greeting; and a girl came forward with a gourd of cool water, before I could dismount.

This sort of welcome was typical of each little village or rancheria that we passed through, on the whole trip. It spoke well for the type of Americans who had traveled the trail before me. Nowhere was there any sign of suspicion or distrust, that sometimes one hears from travelers in remote sections. These people had been treated well by the few Americans they had met, and therefore, liked the "Norte Americanos," and offered what they had in the way of hospitality.

At the next group of guamuchil trees we stopped to replenish our supply. I had become rather fond of riding along and munching this fruit as I shelled it out. On one of the branches above me, I spied what appeared to be some sort of "air plant," with trailing, viny stems and beautiful heart-shaped leaves as waxy and lustrous as fine, glazed pottery. I asked the boy its name. He called it "mata palo" and assured me that it was "muy malo," and would eventually kill the useful tree. As we rode on I saw others which were gradually covering the rough-barked trees, and realized that he was right. After the first pretty stage of a parasitic vine, this plant, which

turned out to be another ficus, sends out long air roots that reach the ground and swell out until finally the original tree is choked by its guest and rots away, leaving a hollow trunk composed of countless twisted and interwoven roots.

We came upon several giant specimens of the strangling plant, later in the day, and were startled by flocks of screaming parrots that rose like green clouds from their branches. These little parrots eat the small figlike fruits, about the size of peas. The fruit is gummy, and sticks to their beaks. The branches are so smooth and waxy that the birds have difficulty in removing this gum; so the parrots fly to a rough-bark tree, to clean their beaks. In so doing, they scratch the bark and deposit seeds that take root during the next wet season. This eventually spells doom for that tree. The whole story, in all of its stages, was plainly visible as we rode along the trail.

Finally, the canyon we were following widened into a valley; and my mozo began telling me of the wonderful watermelons that were to be had at the next rancho; but when we arrived, we found that floods from early rains in the mountains had washed out the field and we were out of luck.

A little farther on my mozo pointed out a rocky promontory, and told me that that was the line of Sinaloa. There was no sign of any sort to tell when we passed into another state, and I doubt if there ever has been a really accurate survey. By common consent, that jutting rock near the trail constitutes a boundary marker, which serves quite well. There, along the bank, was a cluster of cereus cacti that was new to me; and I stopped to examine them, deciding to collect cuttings on the return trip. It looked very much like a new species.

Not much farther down the tributary valley we reached the Fuerte River. It was so swollen and turbulent that I thanked my stars we didn't have to cross it. We made a left turn along its bank and came into the village of Calmoa, where we were greeted by a Chinaman (of all people) who, in pidgin English, assured me that although the "Bossy man" was not home, he had been instructed to give any "Melicum man" who came by plenty "cold dlink."

I followed him, still chattering, into the house, which was rather

large for this area; and to my great surprise, saw a kerosene-operated Electrolux refrigerator dominating the interior. It was after lunch-time; so we stayed at Calmoa during the siesta hour, and the "cold dlinks" were excellent. I have never had the pleasure of meeting the Americans who started a placer dredging on the Fuerte River, and who left those kind instructions with their Chinese "cookee," but I hope that some day I shall.

After siesta, we started on up the river until our trail turned left again and led back in the general direction from which we had come. This sort of thing is common in such a rough country; for it is much easier to go around than over such mountains as we had been skirting. The arroyo we were following became narrower, and rougher, until finally the trail took to one of the side hills above it. Here it was narrow, with a cliff above, and another below. The farther we went, the more mineralized the country looked; and signs of gold mining were on all the hillsides. Below us, from time to time, we could see groups of men, nearly naked, panning in the stream for nuggets. I had passed other riders during the day, and each time had followed the local custom of shaking hands and exchanging introductions on horseback. Up to now, it had seemed a pleasant and picturesque formality; but just as I rounded a very narrow bend in the trail (with at least three hundred vertical feet of nothing below me), what should I meet but a very gay and slightly tipsy gentleman on a skittish horse. He insisted on shaking hands; and exchanging not only names but destinations, business objectives, and bits of biography; while our mounts took turns kicking rocks off the cliff, as they maneuvered for position. This fellow's handshake was genuine, as was his friendliness, but I still shudder when I recall that seemingly interminable five minutes.

The valley widened out, and we dropped down to its floor, where we found a very neat little village. The natives, here, had a mine where they all worked. Each house was situated so that the owner could keep an eye on his claim. The local mining rules allowed one person to own only a ten-meter square, for a claim; but the soft ore was sufficiently rich to make them all comfortable, with a minimum of labor. Each owner brought down his daily

sack of ore, and milled it in a huge stone mortar with a large round grinding stone in the center.

I had never seen ore ground in this manner, and have never seen it again. The center stone was drilled with three holes in the top, in which were driven three wooden pegs, for hand-holds. The operator sat on the ground with the mortar between his legs, and ground the rock, a little at a time, by spinning the grinding stone with a dexterous motion of both hands. The ore, when ground, was taken to the creek and panned out in large wooden bowls, cut from cypress. It was a neat and prosperous place, and the folks were friendly as any, until I asked to see the mine. Then they politely, but firmly, told me this was not permitted.

A little farther down the trail I got the shock of the trip. I stopped and rubbed my eyes and wondered if those "cold drinks" were finally catching up with me; for there, in the middle of the trail, was a bright, rose-colored pig. It wasn't a brownish red, as a red pig should be. It was as bright as if it had been dipped in Easter egg dye. I had hardly gotten over the shock when a baby burro appeared; and it was just the same color. A little farther on we met three small boys. They were stark naked, but, at a distance, they appeared to be wearing red pants. Their little behinds looked for all the world as if they had sat down in a can of barn paint. Then I noticed the stream we were crossing, and realized that all this coloration was coming from it. The water was as red as blood, from haematite ore which was being ground for gold in a small steam-operated mill, about a mile above. All the people we passed had the same red on them, in varying amounts, depending on how deeply they had waded the stream or how far they had washed since.

At Limon they told me of bright yellow bats that lived in the fruit trees. I thought this was just another wild tale, but offered a reward of fifty centavos for a specimen.

We entered a deep narrow canyon on the last stretch of the trail to the mine. My mozo, who had learned by then that I was interested in such things, said that if I cared to walk up a side canyon a little bit he would show me another tree of the fig family which was locally known as the "rain tree." Sure enough, when

we came under the tree, which must have shaded the equivalent of a city block, there was a fine mist falling. A closer inspection, however, showed that the tree was infested by millions of the largest aphids I had ever seen; and the liquid they were dropping was, definitely, not rain.

Back in the saddle again, we rounded a couple more turns, and emerged from the narrow walls of the gorge into an open spot where we could see the mine and buildings on the hill above. A few minutes more and I was greeted with Jim's firm handshake, and the friendly smile. He shouted to his Chinaman, George, to get coffee, pronto; and it was good, as was the meal that soon followed.

My cot, that night, felt finer than any feather bed in the world. Just as I was about to doze off, to the sound of soft-voiced night birds, there was a pounding at the door. It was a little boy from the village, and he had a yellow bat—as yellow as gold.

## *A Crab Collector's Tale*

**M**Y DRAWING of a small crab, with her young tucked under her tail, brings back memories of the discovery of a rare species, and an outstanding yarn that a scientist gave me in exchange for the specimens.

The discovery was a simple enough matter. I was walking along the arroyo, below the ranch, one day when I noticed the shell of a small, reddish-brown crab lying on the bank. We were a long, long way from the sea. I picked up the shell and found that it had been eaten out, by some bird, but the mystery of how it got up into those mountains was a tough one.

A little farther on I found another shell on the bank. A couple of boys, who were swimming in a pool nearby, informed me that there were no such creatures in the arroyo, but that a long way up the canyon there was a spring where many of these crabs lived.

I engaged the boys as guides and, the next day, set off to see what kind of a wild-goose chase they were going to lead me. I was still rather skeptical about crabs in a mountain spring, but one of the advantages of not being a specialized collector is that one is much more likely to give credence to native stories that would sound impossible to an expert. This blind credence of mine has managed to bring to light a good many new species, in several branches of biology, which have delighted the hearts of the specialists, when I turned the specimens over for examination.

It wasn't more than three miles to the spring that the small boys had described as far away. I wondered, when they stopped and told me that this was the spot, if they weren't just getting tired of



walking and had picked on the first spring that they came to. They assured me that this was the one and only spring where the little crabs were to be found. I looked about and saw nothing but a few darting minnows and some lazy pollywogs.

"Turn over the stones," they advised.

I asked them to help, but they refused on the ground that they had been hired only as guides, and not as collectors, and that the little crabs were "muy bravos" and pinched like the devil. I had turned over several stones before I found my first crab—a full-grown male and as full of fight as any creature, of any size, I have ever encountered. I finally subdued him, and popped him into a collecting jar which I had brought along as a gesture of faith.

A few more stones, and out crawled a female with a peculiarly slow gait. She was clumsy and easily caught. When I turned her over I got one of the thrills that sometimes come to a collector. There, tightly held under her tail, was a bundle of tiny crabs about the size of wood ticks, that kept squirming and occasionally spilling out on my hand. Here, I held a truly interesting bit of natural history. I got out my sketchbook and made a drawing. It was a good thing, for the mother became so excited in captivity that she allowed the little fellows to escape, and before I got home they had mostly been eaten by their cannibalistic male elders. I found several more of different sizes, and another adult female with a bundle of bright-yellow eggs under her tail. We kept them all alive in an improvised aquarium, and found out a lot of interesting things; including the facts that they are almost entirely nocturnal in their habits, and feed on insects which they capture by climbing about at night on the trees. I returned to the States with the entire brood alive, plus a set of preserved specimens; and held my breath when I took them to an expert on such matters, to see if they were an exciting discovery, or something well known to science.

My friend lost little time in assuring me that there were no fresh-water crabs known from anywhere near this area; and the life history was distinctly interesting. He did, however, set me right on the matter of fresh-water crabs, by stating that he had collected many different species in Mexico and Central America;

and then followed with this yarn, which I feel well repays me for having brought him the specimens:

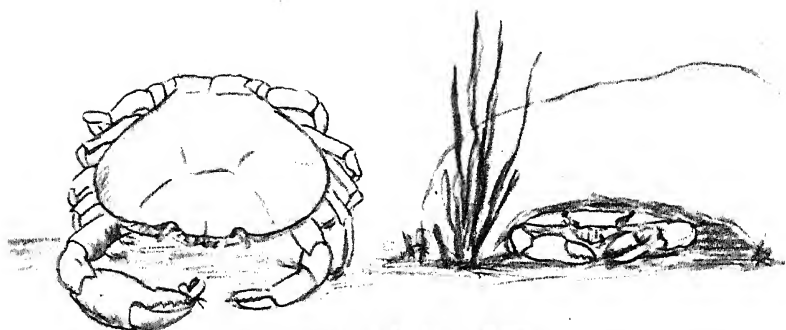
He had heard of a little mountain lake where small fresh-water crabs were reported, and after a rather tough journey, had arrived at the little village on the shore, long after sundown. The only food proved to be in the village cantina, where several of the local rancheros were relaxing over cool beers, or fiery glasses of mescal. My friend ordered a beer and a bite to eat, from the old woman who made tacos in one end of the bar, and returned to introduce himself and inquire about crabs.

Yes, these gentlemen had noticed small crabs on the shore of the lake, but they were far too small to eat. They were sure that they would be out on the beach at night, as that seemed to be their feeding time. My friend hurried with his tacos and beer, and since his baggage had all been taken to the inn up the hill, he decided to go right to work with the materials at hand.

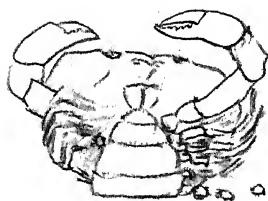
Bottles and jars are carefully saved and are used countless times, for many purposes, in Mexican back country. There on the back bar were some wide-mouthed quart jars that had originally held pickled chilis. He bought one from the bartender, and emerged into the moonlight night. It was only a few steps to the shore of the lake, and to his great satisfaction, dozens of little crabs were scuttling about. In no time at all he had filled the jar with a fine series, and returned to the cantina with his squirming prizes. He set the jar nonchalantly on the bar.

Never thinking how the proceedings looked, he ordered a bottle of native mescal, opened the mouth of the jar and poured it carefully over the still squirming victims. The surprise of the bartender and his customers, if possible, exceeded that of the crabs themselves. The silence could have been cut with a knife, and my friend decided that here was a time and a place for fast thinking. He calmly screwed the lid back on the jar, and pushing it to one side, ordered drinks for the house.

He realized before the drinks were half poured that this was not going to be enough by any means. The very air of the place reeked with curiosity, and possibly suspicion regarding his sanity. As he raised his drink in salute to the others, he suddenly knew in



FRESH WATER INSECTIVOROUS CRAB FROM SONORA



BABY & EGGS APPEAR TO BE  
ATTACHED BY PLUMP-LIKE ORGANS  
UNDER THE TAIL



his heart that he could never tell this group of middle-class ranchers that he had come all this way to get a quart of crabs and carry them back to the States, where they would be dissected, catalogued, and pickled in separate bottles, and distributed to various other scientists; that they would peer at the specimens through microscopes, and write long and learned papers on the slight differences between these and others of the same genus from some other equally unheard-of spot. Somehow there in the yellow glow of the coal-oil lamps, with all these questioning eyes upon him, he realized that the truth would not hold water. He must invent a story that would sound logical to this sort of crowd, and do it fast.

He had spent many a night on the trail, and along similar back-country bars, with just such men as these, and the time listening to their tales had been well invested. When finally the oldest and obviously best-educated man in the room asked the question that was on everyone's tongue, he was ready for him.

"Caballeros amigos," he began, "some tales are stranger than fiction, and sometimes one never is able to say that he either believes or disbelieves, but I have come a long distance to try to prove true or false the story of a wise old medicine man that I met while a very young traveler in the Sierras. This man it seems was over ninety years old, yet his reputation among the women was the talk of the neighborhood. He had been keeping four wives happy for years, and had only recently married a fifth, aged seventeen, who came out smiling and contented the morning after the marriage to add still more luster to his already unusual reputation.

"I lived in this village for some time and did several favors for my friend the medicine man. When I was about to leave, he called me into his hut and, after making sure that no one was within hearing distance, he told me that, since I was of another race and would probably never be around to upset the social balance of his community, he was going to impart to me the secret of his unwaning manhood.

"He stated that the secret had always been kept among a few medicine men as a special mark of superiority, and I must swear,

by all that I held holy, never to divulge it to any of his or neighboring tribes.

"The formula was simple. 'Go to one of three remote lakes in the Sierras every fourteen years. There, in the light of the full moon, gather and pickle in mescal, a supply of the little crabs to be found on the shore. After they have remained in the mescal until the next full moon, eat one crab each morning before breakfast, for another moon. This should suffice to preserve superior manhood for another fourteen years.' I do not say, Señores, that the story is true. I only say that perhaps I believe; that I have come a long way to discover. I am sorry if this seems foolish in your sight. Quien sabe?"

He was met with protestations of belief on every side, and my friend felt he had carried off the matter very nicely. He was a bit worried, however, when, one by one, the gentlemen at the bar bought bottles and went out into the night to gather little crabs, pickling them very solemnly in mescal, and thanking him just as solemnly.

The whole thing seemed a good joke as he rode on over the Sierras to another lake, but he decided to collect his crabs a little more discreetly in the future. The crabs couldn't possibly hurt anyone and, if they were a disappointment, no one could be blamed but the unnamed Indian medicine man. All in all he considered it one of the most successful and amusing lies of his life.

"But it backfired on me," he said as he sat at his desk turning over a bottle of my specimens. "About a year later I received a letter in very old-fashioned and flowery Spanish from the oldest gentleman in the crowd. He said he had gone to considerable trouble to find my burro driver and obtain my address so that he might write me this letter of thanks. He was a widower of seventy when I met him, and in his letter he stated that, after following my formula, he had wooed and won a girl of eighteen, and they were both very happy and expecting an addition in the family.

"And to think," sighed my friend, "I spoiled my entire supply with formaldehyde."

## *The Outdoor Sport of Taking a Bath*

SUMMER is the bathing season in hill-country Sonora. During the dry, cool months of winter, there is hardly enough water in the stream beds for drinking, much less bathing, but as my mule driver once remarked, "Who in his right mind would take a bath in the winter anyway?" Not being a cold-water fiend, myself, I could only agree with him.

When the rains come in the summer, however, bathing is very much in order. Everyone takes a bath when the first flood comes down the arroyo; and it is not at all uncommon to see the children giving the family pigs and dogs a good scrubbing, while they bathe themselves.

Little boys in Sonora are a great deal like little boys in any other country; and they have a tendency to go in swimming and come out with faces just as dirty as when they went in. Usually the older sisters take care of this little detail, if they can catch the culprit, and give him a thorough scrubbing of head and face, to the accompaniment of howls when soap gets in the victim's eyes.

Modesty is a relative factor. A girl who would blush to show her ankle in the village may bathe in the nude, and stand waist-deep to wave at passers-by without the slightest embarrassment. In other sections, bathing is done in the strictest manner. The women wear long slips to go into the water, and do not remove them even in sight of each other. These customs vary from district to district, and sometimes in individual villages.

I remember walking up an arroyo one day and suddenly emerging from behind giant cypress trees to see a lovely sight. There, on the banks of a large pool, were about a dozen young

girls who had been bathing. Now they were perched, nude, on the rocks and cypress knees, combing their hair. I had my camera along, but just as I raised it for a shot, one of the girls gave a warning squeal; and they all dove in like a lot of scared seals. Once in the water, they turned and kidded me unmercifully for attempting to take their pictures in such an embarrassing situation. It took some time to explain that there would be nothing vulgar or lewd about such a photo, and that people, seeing it, would not laugh or make nasty remarks.

Finally, I clinched my arguments by offering a twenty-centavo piece to each girl who would pose just as she was when I came on the scene. This caused a tumult of argument, which finally simmered down to a counter proposition. They would all pose for the fee I had offered; but I must retire down to the bend of the arroyo while they decently came out of the water and got themselves fixed. This seemed fair enough. In no time they called me back to take the picture. The poses were graceful, as if they had all been professional models; and I paid them all fifty centavos instead of twenty, because, as they pointed out, I took several pictures; and they had bargained for just one.

The whole thing backfired, however. They must have bragged about the easy money, and caused quite a scandal in the village. Several irate parents told me that I was never to offer their daughters money for posing in the nude. They felt better when I promised not to show the pictures in Mexico. After that, bathing around that village was the acme of modesty.

The girls have a way of drumming on the water which has always fascinated me. They cup their hands together and strike the water, by coming down with the entire weight of their body. I have watched them dozens of times, but am unable to duplicate the sound. It is as if they were beating a huge drum. It is one of those noises that are not particularly loud, yet will carry five miles, or more, through the jungle. In some sections, this drumming on the water is a signal that girls are bathing, and that males should stay away. In others, it is done just for the pure joy of it. I have yet to find a man or a boy making that noise in the water; or one that knew how.







Yes, the rainy season is the bathing season in Sonora; and it is a happy coincidence that it comes in the warm months. To me, it is a pleasant, drowsy time of year, filled with bright, dewy mornings, dazzling middays, and thunderous evenings when lightning stabs the mountain, and water comes hurtling down in solid sheets from a sunset sky.

Through it all is the feel of things growing. This may seem odd, or impossible, to one who has not experienced it; but during the rainy season things actually grow so rapidly that one is aware of it, just as one is aware of a tide coming in on the beach, or the wind blowing through the trees. I cannot think of the rainy season without remembering this odd, exhilarating sensation, and the distant sound of a group of girls drumming the water under black cypress trees in a flower-lined pool. When they all get going in unison, it sounds as if they were using the earth itself for a resonant, musical instrument.

## *To Alamos for the Mail*

SOMEWHERE I once read a passage that runs something like this: "The ghost of romance clad in shining armor rides silently beside every lone horseman in the hills." This may seem too poetic, but there is something special about striking out alone on horseback over an interesting trail. It took quite a bit to educate the natives and the folks at the ranch, to convince everyone concerned that, at least on trails I knew, I did not require the services of a mozo to trot ahead of my horse all the way.

Since it is customary, I still take one along on trips to areas where I am not known, but the folks around Guirocoba and Alamos have finally accepted my desire to travel alone, along with such other eccentricities as collecting snakes and cactus seeds. They have a belief that the Saints take special pains in guarding the feeble-minded, so I rather doubt if they worry a great deal about my welfare.

This particular morning, I had decided to ride into Alamos to see if I had any mail. The only delivery was by runner, during the rainy season, and there had been no one out our way for several weeks. It would give me a chance to see just how much the country had changed with the coming of the rains, and to visit my friends, the Dows, for a couple of days.

It had rained hard the afternoon before, and now the sun sparkled from millions of wet leaves. The scent of unnamed flowers and damp rich earth filled the air. Birds were singing in the trees, and even in broad daylight a many-toned chorus of frogs rose from the ponds by the wayside, now and then punctuated by the great turtles, croaking in their deep bass "Juan—Juan—Juan—"

The farmers say they are thanking Saint John for bringing the rain. Without knowing when I began it, I found myself humming a little tune to the rhythm of my horse's hoofs, clop-clopping on the soft wet earth.

I passed a couple of boys, riding burros to work in the fields, and their cheery greeting and friendly smiles added to the pleasure of the bright new morning. It is always a source of amusement to me to see the way these kids ride a burro, perched precariously on the very rear end of their long-eared mounts.

A little farther on, I saw others working early in their fields, trying to get the final weeding done and their corn "laid by" for the season. They all waved or called merrily from their tasks, and strengthened the feeling that I have always had, that Mexicans, as a people, are one of the friendliest in the world.

Presently, I heard the roar of water ahead, and, coming round a bend, I could see a stretch of rapids in the arroyo. It looked like a permanent rushing mountain torrent, flashing and boiling over its rocky bed. Lining the sides were a large species of white amaryllis in full bloom. It was hard to believe that all of this water was temporary, and that, with the rainy season over, these arroyos would be dry except for the deep tanks and rock pools at the bases of waterfalls.

At La Puerta (the lower limit of the ranch) the same little girl who always runs out to open the gate was waiting and smiling. She had the bars half down by the time I got there, and was ready with her "Gracias, Señor," for the usual nickel that I gave her.

Just past the gate, I heard quite a commotion in the brush, near the trail, and I pulled up to see what it was all about. I knew that most of the noise was the common call of a group of red-headed parrots, but there was intermixed with this a peculiar wheezy squawk that was harder to identify. It took careful looking to locate the green birds in their perch of green leaves, but when I finally spotted them I saw an amusing sight.

The peculiar wheezy sound came from a baby parrot that was being fed by his mother, and the balance came from his brothers and sisters who were lined up on the limb, waiting for their turn. When I say baby, I am not referring to something tiny and downy.

These parrots continue to feed their young, by regurgitation, long after they are full-grown and able to fly. The youngster, whose feathers are ruffled with the excitement of being fed, looks, actually, bigger than the mother as he opens his mouth, flaps his wings and gulps, between the funny wheezy sounds. Once you have heard this noise, there is no chance of ever mistaking it; yet I find it very hard to describe.

A little farther on, a flight of tiny green parrots shot out from the brush and wheeled overhead, turning and banking in precise flight, like a well trained squadron of airmen. Then they settled into a wild fig tree and disappeared as completely as if they had entered a cave. They were just about the size and exactly the color of the leaves. The natives call these tiny parrots "catolinas," and make cute pets of them.

I have never seen any in the States, but I should imagine they would be very popular among bird collectors, if some doctor hadn't invented psittacosis. Now it is virtually impossible to import any members of this family of birds, all on the strength of a few cases of a disease that has never been proved to exist in wild parrots.

The little settlement of Cajon looked like a movie set in the brilliant morning light. The thatched houses with picket fences or sharpened posts, clustered on the hill among the giant, many-armed cacti, looked as if the settlement had been deliberately planned for artistic effect, instead of just happening that way. The men were all in the fields, and the town was almost deserted. One old lady nodded in a doorway. A skinny white dog got up from a shady spot in my trail, and an old sow grunted placidly on somebody's front porch, as she nursed her numerous brood.

There was plenty of life, however, down at the arroyo. It must have been community washday. Most of the female population was gathered, washing their clothes on rocks at the edge of the great pool. A flock of naked children played and splashed while their mothers or sisters washed their clothes. Over all was a chatter of gossip that would have put even a bridge club to shame, back home. They were all making such a noise that they did not see me, at first. Then, suddenly, a silence fell; followed by a blinding rush of tangled arms, legs, and spray; as the older girls, who were







in swimming, took to deep water. The little boys at the other end of the tank just stood and stared at the "Gringo."

The girls, from the safety of neck-deep water, dared me to take their pictures, and their mothers and older sisters smiled and answered my greetings, as I passed. I had hardly ridden to the top of the next hill before I heard the noise resumed: the shouting of boys at play; the peculiar drumlike sound that the girls make by striking the water; and, over all, the hum of resumed gossip, augmented, doubtless, by conjectures as to why I was riding to town.

The flowers seemed to get thicker and more brilliant as I traveled, especially the various sorts of morning-glories. I counted nine quite distinct species in about a mile; ranging from giant ground morning-glories with six-inch flowers, snow-white and lavender, through tree-climbing varieties of almost every size and hue, even the odd "Flor de San Miguel." This latter is a long-throated morning-glory with a small brick-red blossom and leaves that are the shape of a valentine heart. It is an odd and beautiful sight to see a giant cactus, completely covered with purple or dark-blue morning-glories from base to towering tip.

Another odd sight was the sudden appearance of many colored patches in the trail, from time to time. As I approached these patches, I was surprised to see that they were made up of, literally, thousands of beautiful butterflies, which would sail up and circle me in a cloud as I approached. Sometimes they were so thick as to be disconcerting to the horse. My second and greatest surprise, however, came when I discovered that the attraction that had gathered these lovely creatures together was a pile of fresh cow manure. I had to scare up several patches of butterflies, with the same results each time, before I was ready to admit to myself that, in this land of abundant flowers, they should be attracted to such a bait. The reason still remains a mystery to me.

The village of Laborcita was also almost deserted. People waved from the fields as I passed, and called out a cheery adios. I like the way this little village perches on its hill, and have painted a picture of part of it against a huge thunder cloud.

When I finally reached Agua Blanca I was beginning to get

thirsty, so I stopped and asked a lady in the village if I might have a drink. She invited me to get down from my horse, and a little girl fetched a chair while her mother dipped me a drink from the family olla. The drink and short rest refreshed me, and I was soon on my way with the ancient and beautiful "Vaya con Dios" ringing in my ears. This phrase, introduced by the first padres into Mexico, still remains the standard farewell to the traveler. To me it seems to embody all of the friendliness and hospitality of these people.

A little farther on, I saw the well where the town of Agua Blanca gets its water. I stopped and drew some for the horse to drink. The water was probably all right, for it looked clear enough in a drinking gourd, but in the well it had the appearance of the soapy-gray-green stuff mother used to drain out of her washing machine, after doing the dark clothes. The horse liked it, however, and I was thankful that I had taken typhoid antitoxin before I came to Mexico.

As the day wore on, the horse seemed to gradually slow down, and the sun got hotter and hotter. To top this off, the trail was much wider here and the trees shorter, so we were traveling in the open sun most of the time. It seemed that we would never reach the Cuchuhaqui arroyo, where I intended to eat and take a siesta. I think the horse was getting pretty thirsty by then; and I know that I was.

Finally we topped a rise and I could hear the roar of the water below. The horse heard and smelled it too, for he quickened his steps. Soon we were descending the last rocky incline and stopping at the water's edge. The horse could hardly wait till I had taken his bridle off to drink, and, as soon as I did, I lay flat on my stomach beside him and drank from the cool stream of rain water, with almost as much abandon as he.

Tying my horse in a shady patch of grass, I loosened the saddle cinches and left him to a well earned rest and a meal. A little farther down the canyon, I stopped, where a large tree shaded a bare stretch of rock beside a still pool, and took a refreshing bath. Then I ate my lunch and stretched out on the flat rock, to take my siesta. The sound of a rushing little rapid, at the head of the pool, soon lulled me to a restful sleep.

I think I had slept for about an hour when I was awakened by the sound of voices and of hoofs, striking rough rock. An old man and his two daughters were riding down the trail, toward the arroyo, and they looked as tired as I had been. The old man rode a sad-looking mule, and the girls rode sidesaddle on a donkey. They disappeared in the undergrowth of the arroyo, and I judged, from the sounds, that the girls were taking a bath. Presently, I saw that the old man had come a discreet distance below the girls, and was also getting ready to bathe. I lost all interest in the party at this point, for suddenly I heard a splash that seemed foreign to the regular sound of the rapid above, and saw that it was made by a very large fish, trying to jump the waterfall. He tried again and failed, but the third time he made it. Presently, another and still larger fish appeared and made several unsuccessful attempts at the fall. I suddenly got very hungry for fish. I had nothing in the way of fishing tackle, nor anything that I could convert for the purpose, not even a pin to bend for a hook; so I had to sit and watch several more of these finned beauties go on up stream. They seemed to be migrating for upper waters, like salmon. Then I thought of it—I had a twenty-five automatic in the saddlebag with my lunch, and with luck I might shoot one of the “darned” things. The sportsmanship of the setup didn’t enter into the deal at all. I was simply hungry for fish.

I got out the little pistol and crouched as near to the waterfall as I could, in hope that another fish would come to the surface. Then I happened to think that I had better make some provision for retrieving him, if I shot him. Hurriedly, I undressed and crouched, naked, watching the water for my prey. It was just then that the old man saw me for the first time, and let out a startled grunt. He wasn’t exactly expecting a naked man with a gun in his hand to appear like that.

He started to say something, but just then I saw my quarry. He was a beauty. I knew he wouldn’t be able to make the fall the first try; so I watched him, to determine the exact point where he slowed up and started to slide back. This would be the right time for a shot. The second time, I was ready for him with a bead drawn on the approximate spot where his black back would come out of

the water. His head came under my sights and I pulled the trigger, dropped the gun on the rock, and raced to the quiet part of the pool to retrieve him. Sure enough, he came floating down, and I grabbed him. I thought I had heard considerable commotion during this brief period, but I had been too occupied to look up. Now, I suddenly became aware of the fact that I was far from alone. The two girls had come rushing through the brush to see if their father had been shot, and the old man was simply standing there petrified. He looked awfully funny, for he had just lathered himself all over. Suddenly he seemed to come to. He let out a sort of squeak, and took off like a scared jackrabbit, leaving a trail of flying lather. The girls followed at top speed, forgetting that they were still as naked as I. I thought about trying for another fish, but decided that this four-pounder was plenty for a good meal, and fish do not keep well in this climate; so I dressed and got ready to leave.

As I emerged from the brush, on my horse, I met the party I had frightened so badly, face to face. They looked startled, but stood their ground. I rode up and introduced myself and explained that I had only been shooting a fish.

"But Señor," the old gentleman said, "you can't shoot fish."

"Yes, I can," I replied, reaching into my saddlebag and drawing forth my prize. Then the girls started to laugh. I did not know what they were laughing at, but I laughed too. Presently the old fellow was chuckling and muttering something about the "unpredictable Americano."

We rode into Alamos, together, and the way did not seem half so long, for the girls kept up a friendly banter and occasionally broke into some of their favorite songs. It seemed to please even the old man when I was able to help with a few that I knew.

A little way out of town, the girls stopped, took off their "guarachas," and put on shoes and stockings from out of the bags they carried behind them on the burro. They had already put on their best dresses after their bath at the arroyo, and the old man had changed to a clean white pair of trousers and white shirt. I felt a little shabby, riding into town with them, for they certainly put their best foot foremost.

That is one mistake that we Americans are likely to make in this country. These people try to look their very best when they ride into town, and we are apt to come dragging in, needing a shave, covered with dust, and wearing clothes we wouldn't be caught in, at home. Anyway, if they resented my appearance, they didn't show it. We finally topped the last hill and Alamos lay in the valley below, bathed in a magic rose-colored light; for the sun was just setting. It looked like something out of a fairy story, some lovely city made of mother-of-pearl and coral.

My companions stopped to look, as I did. The girls did not gush, as a couple of Americans would, trying to impress me with their appreciation of the beauty. They just said "Que bonito Alamos" and sat and watched the colors change and fade in silence. I couldn't say anything; Alamos, at sunset, seems to affect me that way.

I said good-by to my traveling companions in the plaza and soon had my horse hitched in the alameda in front of the Dow house. Don Fredrico and his wife, Lolita, welcomed me at the door. Fred started kidding me about anybody who would stoop so low as to shoot a poor defenseless fish, while his wife, who had already appropriated my trophy, was busy in the kitchen explaining to the cook just how to bake it with tomatoes, onions and a little chili.

I was tired and a little stiff, but mighty glad that I had decided to ride to Alamos for the mail.

## *Collecting Reptiles*

A LETTER from Charles Bogert of the American Museum of Natural History started a rather interesting train of events, on one of my trips into Sonora. The letter followed me from the States, and did not catch up with me until I was settled at the ranch. Mr. Bogert had discovered that I was in the area for the whole rainy season, and wrote to find out if I would be willing to collect for his institution. He wanted a series of the typical reptiles and amphibia of the region. I was surprised to hear that a country so accessible had not already been collected; but it seems that museums have thousands of dollars to spend in their other departments, and very little with which to carry on the science of herpetology.

My sojourn in the country during that particular time of year was especially important, since many of the reptile forms and most of the amphibia are sleeping somewhere under rocks, or buried in the mud, until the coming of the rains. The whole thing sounded rather simple. All I had to do was to read the small pamphlet, inclosed, on the preparation of reptiles in the field, get some containers and preservative and start pickling all the "critters" that came crawling or swimming across my path. I answered that I would accept the job and would start at once to make a collection. It was a chance to help science, learn something, and earn a little money toward the expenses of my trip.

My answer was hardly in the hands of the runner, who would carry it on foot to Alamos, when I started out to see what I could find to enrich man's knowledge of reptiles. Down by the arroyo I had noticed some very interesting little lizards with black-and-white ringed tails which they carried in a high curve up over their

back. The little boys called them "perritos" (little dogs), because of the way they waved their tails as they ran. The rains had not set in and all life was pretty scarce, even lizards; but these "perritos" were thick in the sandy bed of the arroyo. I was confident I could get a fine series in no time. It did not take me very long to discover two things: first, I was no match for the little striped-tailed lizards; and second, the antics of a full-grown man chasing lizards brought forth rather uncomplimentary side glances from the villagers, who gathered to see what was the matter with me.

Finally a couple of little boys came to my rescue. They carried the usual slingshots and a pocketful of stones. One of them drew a bead on a lizard twenty feet away and knocked him kicking into the sand, at the first shot. I gave the boy a Mexican nickel, and in no time the small boys of the village were out in force. Pebbles were buzzing from dozens of slingshots in a regular blitzkrieg. Striped-tailed lizards were biting the dust, all around, to the tune of a nickel apiece. I tried to call a halt, but only succeeded after I had bought over two pesos' worth of lizards. This taught me that employing a small boy with a slingshot is the most efficient method of collecting small reptiles in Sonora, and that there must be a set of rules to keep from depleting the reptile population—and my supply of Mexican five-cent pieces.

As I paid each boy I explained that I would not, under any conditions, purchase any more of this species of lizard; but I would give a nickel each for any other kinds brought in during the next twenty-four hours. They seemed mystified as to why one lizard should be of more interest to me than another—but five centavos was five centavos—and they separated in search of others.

I put all the lizards in a collecting sack; then I bought a couple of quarts of mescal in the village, and went home to pickle my first lot of specimens. The museum had promised to ship me some "formalin," but added that any strong native liquor would make a suitable preservative until their package arrived. I had sampled this particular lot of mescal a few nights before, and was in a position to vouch for its strength.

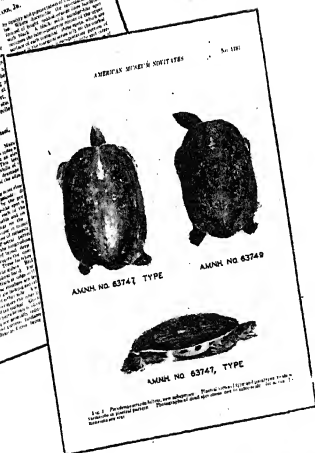
My instructions were to kill the specimens by immersing the sack in warm water and drowning them. These lizards looked

pretty dead when I got to the house, so I put them all in a wide-mouthed jar and poured in enough mescal to cover them. Before I could screw the cover on, most of the lizards came suddenly to life, and a couple climbed out and raced madly across the floor. It was at this point that one of my hostesses came into the room to discover the cause of the commotion. I had no idea she was so afraid of lizards! When the whole thing subsided and the vagrants were safely steeping in mescal with their brethren, I promised not to bring any more reptiles farther than the front porch.

Gradually, the boys began coming back in twos and threes with their catches. I set up my purchasing office and pickling department on the front porch; and the collection began to grow. They had quite a variety; many of which I had never seen. I was very gratified. Several die-hards brought me additional specimens of the original striped-tailed lizards; and offered them at reduced prices, all the way from two to five for a nickel. I was adamant; for if I had purchased a single one, the whole structure of my collecting idea would have collapsed. The boys were a little sore and disappointed, but the next day they were back with something that I did want. As soon as I had a good series of any other lizard, I placed the bottle in plain sight, and told each of my collectors that I had plenty of this kind and would purchase no more. After about the fourth day, things began to slow down in the collecting line. It became apparent that I had a series of all of the commoner types, but I had one or two of several forms that appeared to be either scarce or hard to take. With this discovery, I modified my system a bit further, and raised the price of these reptiles to a dime. Then I offered fifteen centavos for anything not so far represented in this collection. With this added stimulation, I was able to complete several more series before the rains came.

I realized that with the rains there would be an advent of many different forms that were rare or absent during the dry season. I made it very plain that we would be back on the five-cent basis, after the first rain. The boys not only saw the fairness of this plan but seemed anxious for the rains to come; for they insisted that after that they could make a great deal more collecting at a nickel apiece than they could now at fifteen cents.







Finally one of the great thunder clouds that had been threatening every afternoon came over the mountain and broke in all its fury. I have seen it rain elsewhere, but I can truthfully say that I have never seen so much water come down in so short a time. In a few minutes the yard was a lake, and we could hear the roar of rushing water going over the dam in what had been a dry arroyo that very afternoon. The storm was over in an hour and, before the sun set, a stream of boys came sloshing in through the front gate, burdened down with the "darnedest" collection of lizards, frogs, snakes and turtles that I have ever seen. They knew that I was going to purchase only a limited number of any of these things, and they all wanted to be in on the easy money. Most of the snakes were badly battered and mangled. Many of them looked like fine varieties, but I refused to purchase them in such a condition. If I had, I would never have gotten a good specimen; for the boys seemed to think that a snake had to be beaten to a pulp before it could be carried, even in a sling on the end of a long stick. The next day the same boys were back with other specimens, alive and wriggling, in nooses at the end of poles. They had snared them. It was a constant source of wonder for them to watch me take these wriggling fellows out of the snares with my hands. I don't think money could have hired them to touch a snake, dead or alive.

I had two five-gallon tins full of reptiles by now, and toads and frogs were piling in by the dozen. I have never seen so many different kinds of toads in my life. We caught five different species, hopping about in the yard, one evening after a rain. The arroyo rang with a chorus of frogs in a range from the highest high tenor to the deepest basso profundo. We soon discovered that some of the loudest of these fellows were also the smallest. Several of the tree frogs sounded almost like birds, and actually fooled a good bird collector, when he came to Guirocoba.

I think the most outstanding frog specimens were brought to me one night by the mozo who carried the water for the house. He said he found them sitting on the edge of the well. They were the most brilliant green I have ever seen, with topaz-colored eyes that blinked and glittered in the light of the gasoline lantern. I didn't have the heart to kill them. Their skin was like polished jade, with-

out a wart or mark on it; and they were about four inches long. I put them in an empty water olla on the porch, so I could show the boys in the morning and ask for more. The next morning I took the lid off the olla to show a couple of boys the beautiful green frogs. They weren't green at all! They were the same reddish-brown of the earthen water jar. The boys laughed, hilariously, and told me to put some green leaves in the olla and see what happened. In a few minutes the frogs were as green as ever. This species never seemed to be common, and I had to raise the price to twenty-five centavos each, before I got a good series for the museum and half a dozen to keep alive for pets. I never received a lone specimen. They were always found and caught in pairs. One morning the maid found a beautiful pair sleeping under the washtub. The specimens I took back to the States lived and were quite happy in captivity, for about two years. They finally died, within a period of about forty-eight hours, without seeming to act sick or ever losing their appetites. Someday I am going to have some more. They make fine pets, and will take insects or meal worms right out of a person's hand, after they are tame. Perhaps they got the wrong sort of bug. I'll feed the next ones on meal worms; for I know they thrive on this diet.

After the first surge, following the rains, the reptile business slowed down again; but I had a collection many times larger than I had dreamed was possible. I had spent over half the money the museum was paying, but I felt that I had spent it wisely. There were a few things that did not come in very fast. Most of these were either poisonous or the boys had been led to believe them so. One small, warty, nocturnal lizard, with suction cups on its toes, was considered terribly poisonous—even to the touch. I was forced to collect my own series of these, which I did in one night with the aid of a flashlight. The natives called this night lizard "salamanquez," and considered it a great deal worse than a rattler.

I never had the heart to kill the turtles, but kept a good series of all but one species alive in an old steep-sided cement water trough. They were the source of a great deal of amusement. One little, spotted species turned out to be new to science. It has since

been named after Dr. Klauber of the San Diego Zoo. I was not able to obtain a full series of this species, even though I raised my offer to two pesos. Another larger black turtle, with orange on the sides, was named for me, by the American Museum, thus assuring me everlasting fame in the annals of herpetology, or something.

The Gila monsters were the toughest things to handle, and to kill. The natives were very superstitious about these, and although they snared them and brought them in on the ends of long poles, they would never touch one, even if it was dead. I had "drowned" a particularly large specimen one afternoon, and was preparing him for preservation, when a couple of fellows came in with a live boa constrictor. It was a baby, about six feet long, and in fine shape. I paid them two pesos for it and went on with my work, while they sat on the rock fence and watched. The whole thing mystified and fascinated them. My instructions were, in the case of the larger reptiles, to remove the internal organs, but to make a note of the contents of the stomachs, on the tag. This particular fellow had just robbed a nest of Douglas quail, and had fifteen unbroken eggs in his stomach. A few of these had been slightly punctured by his needlelike teeth, but the rest were apparently quite fresh. I had finished making my notes, and cleaning everything out of the two-and-a-half-foot reptile, including the heart and lungs. I dropped him in the can of mescal, and turned my attention to the writhing boa. Just then one of the boys let out a yell and fell backward off the fence. The other one just sat there frozen, staring wide-eyed at something behind me. I turned to see the "drowned" and completely empty Gila monster walking directly toward me, snapping his jaws together like a steel trap with every few wabby steps. The stimulating powers of that mescal had been proven again. I have the word of four other Americans, and a yardful of villagers, that the big reptile walked about the yard for about ten minutes, snapping at sticks that were thrust in front of him, and appearing to see and hear. It was a nasty sight. I have caught several Gila monsters with my bare hands, without a qualm. They are sluggish and clumsy, but catching this fellow and returning him to the

preserving can was one of the most distasteful things I have ever been forced to do. It was like picking up a ghost.

I was never harmed by any of the reptiles, and none of the boys were ever bitten, even by the harmless varieties. They saw to that. There was one snake called a "pechequate" that the boys insisted whistled instead of hissing, and struck backward, anchoring its tail in the ground with a hornlike point. I kept raising my offer for a specimen of this until it finally reached ten pesos. Three badly battered ones were finally brought in, but there was enough left to get a pretty good idea of what they looked like. The boys were right about the horn on the tail; and the snake was obviously poisonous, from the shape of its head. Its body was wide and flat, like a big fat ribbon, and repulsive in appearance and odor. The first one they brought me gave forth such a violent stench that I thought it was rotten, and almost refused to buy it. The others were still twitching but had the same odor.

Mr. Bogert informed me that the snake belonged to the same family as the water moccasin; but my native friends insist that it is never found anywhere except in the driest tops of the hills. I hope to see one of these snakes alive, and bring some back for study, someday, but it will be a project in itself.

A visitor to the ranch would probably have taken one look at the variety of reptiles I had preserved, and decided the place was not safe for a white man. On the contrary, we rode all over the country and hiked at least a hundred miles that summer, and the only poisonous things I ever saw and caught in the brush were a couple of slow-moving Gila monsters, who did their level best to get away from me.

The only other poisonous reptile I caught was a tiny bright-colored snake I found one morning in the middle of the village. It was so brilliant in hue and so shiny with its newly changed skin that I kept it alive for about a week. It became very tame and I fed it small worms and insects. Never once, even when I first caught it, did it offer to bite. The reptile-hating members of the household thought this little "king snake" was the prettiest specimen I had collected. I really hesitated to kill and preserve it; but it was the only one. After I returned to the States and the museum had made

out a check list of the specimens, I noticed they listed "one coral snake" under the poisonous reptiles. I had to look at the number in my field notes before I could believe that this was the mild-natured, bright-colored little pet that I had hated to kill. "A little knowledge is a dangerous thing."

## *Ride to the North Star*

CHOQUINCAHUI is the name of a mountain and the name of a spring, as well. In the native Indian it means "north star." Occasionally the man who lives at Choquincahui would come down to the village with a burro load of papayas, mangoes, or summer tomatoes. These fruits were so fine, and the man so friendly, that Eunice and I finally decided to visit the little settlement and see the spring and fruit garden for ourselves.

I had been up the trail toward the north end of the ranch, several times, but never as far as Choquincahui spring. Once it had been for fresh-water crabs; another time, to collect a rare plant which the natives called "La Palma de La Virgen" (the virgin's palm).

Beyond the canyon of the virgin's palm I had not traveled the north trail, so we took one of the vaqueros to show us the way. Mac wanted him to check on some fences anyway.

Planters were still working in some of the fields as we passed in the early morning. They whistled or sang as they worked, rivaling the multitude of song birds in the trees. The sun had broken through light clouds after a red sunrise; and now it sparkled on the young corn, just peeping through the earliest fields; and shone like diamonds on the dew-wet grass beside the trail. The vaquero said it might rain—that the red sunrise was a pretty sure sign. We refused to let it bother us. It was too beautiful a morning to let anything worry us.

As we climbed higher and left the fields we could look back and see the Rancho Guirocoba stretching away into the blue haze to the south. The patchwork of fields in the bottom of the valley



was broken here and there by great oaks, clusters of small palms, and giant cacti of the pitahaya or fruit-bearing kind. Whether the original farmers were too lazy, or too artistic, to cut these fine growths will probably remain a secret of the past; but the effect is beautiful. It would take a hard-hearted person to cut them out now, even in the name of efficiency and advancement.

A canyon loomed ahead in the hills, and we were soon traveling through its shade. The little stream, swollen with the summer rains, rushed by like a mountain torrent, boiling over the cypress roots and boulders in its bed, and waving the ferns and lilies along its margins. The smell of growing things and the scent of flowers was almost overpowering, as the canyon narrowed. It reminded me of a large greenhouse. In places, we had to stop a moment while the vaquero cut away the vines that had grown across the trail in the last month.

Finally we came to the spot where I had collected the first fresh-water crabs; but the pool was submerged in a welter of rushing water. No crabs were to be found. We did notice some extremely odd butterflies at this stop. They were marked with concentric circles or "eyes" of red, orange and black on a chocolate background. When they lit on a tree trunk and folded their wings, they simply disappeared.

I tried to catch some with my hat, and wished we had brought a butterfly net. Then I smiled at myself, as I took stock of the cameras and other paraphernalia we had already draped on our long-suffering horses. I did get very close to several, and could see that the outside of the wings was marked and colored to imitate rough bark. Even the edges of the wings had an uneven, torn appearance, that made it impossible to detect them at rest more than five feet away. The strangest thing about these butterflies, and one which I cannot get many people to believe, was the noise they occasionally made. They would sail about from sunlight to shadow as silently as any respectable butterfly, until they encountered another of apparently the opposite sex. Then the pair would whirl about in tight circles, like a couple of planes in a dogfight, and produce a sharp, very distinct clicking noise, that seemed to be synchronized with their wings. The faster they circled, the louder

and faster the clicking became. They remain a mystery to us, to this day. I came back to the spot with a butterfly net and cyanide jar, a week later, but none were to be seen; nor have I ever seen them in any other spot but that one shady canyon.

A little farther on, we stopped to admire a colony of lilies, belonging to the arum or calla family. They had very decorative leaves with cut edges, and small white flowers which, unlike many wild arums, had a pleasant odor. Eunice decided to get a flower collection, on the way back. Every turn of the trail seemed to reveal some new blossom we had never seen before. Bright-plumaged birds flashed ahead of us in the trees, and kept the woods echoing with their calls. Dragonflies as wide as a man's hand, with green bodies and transparent wings dotted with black and red, flitted over the still spots in the stream. The whole place was like a dream in technicolor.

At the head of the canyon we emerged into a meadow, dotted with oak and palm clusters. The grass was deep and lush, sprinkled with rainbow-hued flowers, like jewels on green velvet. It was the sort of meadow that made a person envy the horses, grazing there. The meadow rose gently toward the summit of the pass ahead. Each side of the pass was flanked with towering crags, which have probably never been scaled by man. On their summits were pines and firs. We could look back at the valley below and see every gradation, from tropics to alpine vegetation, in a single glance.

Out of the welter of flowers at our feet, I noticed something that looked familiar—yet very odd. It was a poinsettia in full bloom, in the middle of the summer; small and dwarfed, like the dwarf poinsettias in cultivation. But the red leaves, that looked like the flowers, were longer and more acute; and the stems were grasslike, and only about nine inches high. We got off our horses and searched the place for seed; but it was a little too early. This annual poinsettia is one of the seeds that I hope sometime to collect from Sonora, and try to domesticate.

Now, the trail led down into the canyon of la palma de la virgen, shaded here by large-leaved palo blanco trees. Their white bark shone in the spots of sun that penetrated here and there.

Suddenly a deer flashed across the trail and made a great deal

of noise, as it plunged on through the undergrowth. Flocks of yellow-crested quail flushed, as we passed; and giant blue doves cooed, like the tolling of distant bells. It was a hunters' paradise; but we were glad that the hunters hadn't found it.

The vaquero had ridden ahead; and now we met him waiting at a bend in the trail. He held something that looked like a flame in the shaft of light that came down through the trees. He had noticed our interest in flowers, and had found us something really fine. It was a giant tigridia, six inches across, shaped like a mariposa tulip, but colored like a tiger lily; the most beautiful flower we had ever seen in Mexico. A little farther down, we saw many of them growing, scattered under the trees. Their stems were five to six feet tall. We wondered what a Hollywood florist would pay for a dozen, as a window display; and again realized how really lucky we were.

At the bottom of the canyon we dismounted beside another sparkling stream; and I led Eunice to the hillside, beyond, where Howard Gentry and I had first found the rare palms, some years before.

The colony was still there, and the trees looked as beautiful and unreal as they did on that first day. The palma de la virgen is not actually a palm, but a cycad. This family of plants once formed an important part of the world's forests, during the coal age. Now it has all but disappeared from the earth. They look like a cross between a small palm and a tree fern, and bear a cone which resembles a large furry pineapple. Inside this cone are large round nuts that are said to be edible.

The largest of this Sonora species is only three to four feet high. It looked dwarfed by the mass of maidenhair fern, two feet deep, and the hundreds of orange tigridias. Pale-yellow and light-green butterflies, almost as large as my hand, sailed effortlessly from flower to flower. A gentle breeze swayed the cycad fronds; and the sunlight sparkled on them with an almost metallic luster. We stood there and looked for several minutes without saying a word. Some moments are like that, and can never be forgotten.

As we rode on down the canyon, we came upon a dozen chachalaca birds in a tree. They were busily eating the small purplish-

black fruits, and making such a racket they did not hear us, at first. We had heard these birds close to the ranch; but it was seldom we got a look at one. These had not been shot at, and were more tame. They looked like a combination of a small turkey and pheasant. The plumage on the males was iridescent, with green and purple over brown. When they finally noticed us they flew up and disappeared in the thicker trees, making the ear-splitting call that sounds like their name rendered by a rusty old-fashioned pump.

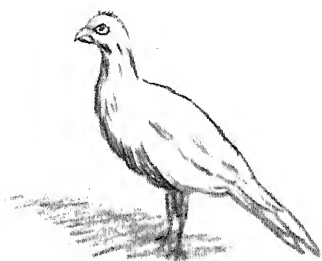
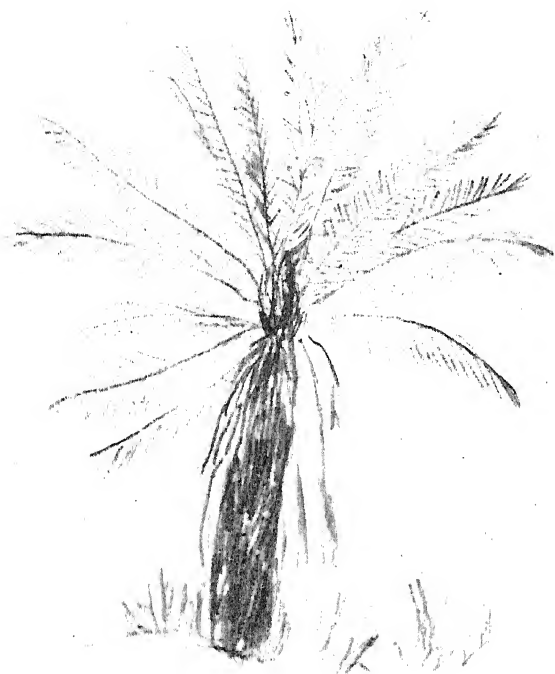
The trail led up from the canyon, and onto another meadow pass called "La Mesa del Trigo." From this point the peak of Choquincahui loomed a veritable giant against the northern sky. The vaquero pointed to a clearing and some palm-thatched houses at its foot. This was our destination.

At the bottom of the hill we came upon the ruins of an old Spanish copper smelter; its broken stack, now smothered in luxuriant vines; and the adobe houses, crumbling among the trees that had grown back into the clearing. Our guide said the mine was about a kilometer away, and was a very good ledge of copper ore.

We were anxious to get to the fruit garden and eat our lunch; so we pushed on up the next hill. Finally, the thatched houses came into view again. We were greeted by a host of skinny dogs, barking in a wide range of pitch. The children were shy, and ran into the house; but the grownups were the acme of politeness. They must have spotted us on the trail; for they had hot coffee and tortillas, and insisted that we sit right down to eat with them. We got out our lunch and shared it with them. They sampled everything, and were amused; but I don't think they really relished any of our American delicacies, except the can of peaches we opened.

Some hard candy finally coaxed the children out of the house, and gradually they discovered we were human beings, no more dangerous than the people they had always known. The father apologized, because the little ones were "muy bronco." He explained that they had never been away from the place—not even as far as Guirocoba.

Presently the oldest girl, about eleven, left for a moment; and, when she returned, she had a chachalaca bird. She put it in my wife's lap. It was as gentle as a pet hen. Then she brought a few





grains of corn, and the bird ate right out of her hand. Eunice was enchanted.

The father finally volunteered the information that the little girl would like to sell the chachalaca, but was too bashful to say so. We had about as much use for a tame bird as we did for a crutch, at the moment; but Eunice couldn't think of going away without it, and thought we should save it for Bill Sheffler. We asked how much the bird would be, and after quite a family discussion, the father inquired if two pesos would be too much.

Considering the fact that the girl had found the egg in a wild nest, set it under a hen, and raised it to maturity, we thought the price reasonable. We drank some more coffee, and sat, enjoying the companionship of this mountain family.

I complimented the coffee; and they explained that it was gathered, wild, from trees that had been planted a few kilometers away by a German many years ago. His venture had failed; but the coffee bushes had thrived in the mountain soil. Now they had all the coffee they wanted, for the picking. We bought ten kilos of the raw beans, as it was much better than we could get at the stores in Alamos.

Our vaquero had been looking around the garden, and came back with a suggestion. He said he knew we would want a great deal of the fruit, and he would like to buy some for his own family and friends in the village. If he could start back early, he was willing to load his horse with our coffee and fruit, plus whatever he wanted to buy; and walk back. We knew the trail, and did not mind going back alone—in fact, we rather looked forward to the idea; but we protested his walking. Then he confessed that he could sell the fruit he bought at a profit, to his friends, and thus get double pay for his day's work. This was satisfactory to us; so we all went out into the gardens, to get him loaded. The children, their shyness completely forgotten, set to gathering tomatoes, mangoes and papayas. We were disappointed that the bananas were still small and green.

Soon our companion was loaded, and on his way; and we could look about us at the great spring that flowed out of the hillside above us, and the careful terracing that this family had accom-

plished to make a mountain slope into a fertile garden. Patches of chilis and potatoes were growing well, and the corn was almost in the roasting-ear stage; while the corn in the valley, below, was just coming up.

We could not help thinking how much richer the lives of all the people in the district would be if they could harness the summer water, and irrigate crops.

It began to look pretty stormy in the southeast; so we saddled up and said good-by to our hosts. They were waving and calling "Adios—que vayan con Dios," as far as we could see and hear them.

The journey home became a flower-collecting trip for Eunice. She was soon loaded down with a giant bouquet that would have been the envy of any movie queen. I carried the chachalaca in front of me; and she carried the flowers. We made quite a procession.

As we came down out of the last meadow into the canyon below, my horse snorted and came to a sudden stop. There, in the middle of the trail, was the largest Gila monster I had ever seen. I couldn't pass it up; as I was making a collection of reptiles for the American Museum of Natural History. I gave the chachalaca to Eunice, who somehow managed to get it and her flowers arranged so she could see past them. Then I tied my horse.

The Gila monster was slightly over thirty inches long; by actual measurement—as mean-looking a reptile as I ever saw. His ugly black head was almost as large as my hand. He lay there, motionless in the trail, watching us with his beady eyes. I could see why this Mexican species was called "Horridus."

These reptiles are slow and rather clumsy. He was easily caught, but once I got my hand round his thick neck, he wasn't easy to handle. I couldn't put him in my collecting sack, as he could readily bite through it and get either the horse or myself. I had to carry him all the way home. It was quite a trick to get back on that horse, one-handed. The horse, definitely, did not take to Gila monsters.

I finally made it, and we started down the trail at a pretty good clip. It was just as well, for the sky was black now and the thunder was an almost continuous roar. The rest of the trip was a race against the rain, and a constant struggle on my part to hold onto the



horse and the Gila monster, which insisted on rubbing my arm raw with his horny tail.

We came into the ranch-house gate just as the first big drops began to spatter. Stiff and tired from holding onto our unusual loads, we both had to be helped from our horses, to the accompaniment of considerable laughter. I guess we must have presented a pretty funny appearance; but we didn't mind.

## *The Importance of Customs*

“*NO ES costumbre*” is one of the commonest expressions in Sonoran conversation, and one of the few arguments to which there is no answer. If a thing is not customary, then it just isn’t done; and that is the end of that. Customs vary with almost every town and village, but they are as unchangeable as the laws of the Medes and Persians in their particular type locality.

The little boy with no pants wasn’t breaking any customs in his dress. In fact, around Guirocoba when you ask a proud parent how old Pablo is they will say, “Well, last year he was old enough to wear pants.” In other communities in higher altitudes, or farther north, this little boy in his outfit would be the subject of considerable shocked comment, or at least pity or ridicule.

The little chap was, however, breaking a custom and very unhappy about the matter. In the village it is the custom of the women and girls to carry water. This boy had but one sister, and his mother was sick. The sister had married and moved away, so he was in a spot. Until his mother became well again, some male member of the family would have to carry the water. Tears welled in his eyes as he told me how, after all, you couldn’t expect his father to stoop to such a thing, and how each elder brother had insisted it was below his dignity, until no one was left for the job but the youngest boy—who was too small to make his protests carry any weight.

He had, however, retained a certain shred of his male dignity by refusing to carry the water in an olla, like a girl. An old canteen I had discarded had been plugged up and supplemented with a tin can, to which he had attached a wire bale. With this equipment

he had to carry about three times as many loads as if he had used an olla, but he could thus salvage a little of his self-respect.

The little girls in the same village never, never appear in such a get-up. It would be considered disgracefully immodest, unless the child was taking a bath in plain sight of everyone, or answering the call of nature in the back yard.

Customs are funny things, even in my own country, but one of the first things I learned in Sonora was the fact that they must be considered if a stranger expects to get along and make friends. There is a certain lenience to a stranger concerning such things. Even the mountain villagers realize that customs vary in other countries. They usually wait until one is broken, or about to be, and then kindly explain, "No es costumbre"; then, if you go ahead and break the custom, you are considered to be just what you are: a very inconsiderate and ill-bred person.

There are two quite distinct ways of seeing any foreign country. One is to approach it as if it were a zoo or botanic garden. Most guidebook tourists and all-expense excursionists approach Mexico this way. In such cases it is not particularly important to observe or consider the customs of the land. The free-show idea works both ways. The natives stare and wonder right back at the tourists. The other, and to my way of thinking best way, is to visit a neighboring country in the same spirit as visiting a strange neighbor. The object of such a trip would not only be to see but to at least partially understand and, if possible, establish friendly relations. The latter type of traveling will pay abundant dividends, not only to the individual American, but to both countries.

If an American wishes to travel in Mexico and make friends and social or business contacts, a few hours studying the customs of each community will be priceless, and a few general precautions will help anywhere he goes. To the average citizen of Sonora, the standard American tourist is either too free with his money or entirely too stingy. Few of them learn how to give money to a beggar, tip a servant, or pay a child for a small service until they have made so many mistakes that the whole town considers them crassly crude. These facts can easily be checked for any particular community by consulting the average hotel clerk, as can any

other pertinent differences in customs. In the country, after the roads are left behind, the burro-driver guide is usually well informed on the local ideas of propriety. It makes a hit with him if he is consulted and his advice requested on such matters.

One standard rule is never to give money to children who follow and beg. If a child performs a small service he or she should be given a reasonable tip; but this should be reasonable in Mexican currency, and not computed in American dollars and cents. A good standard is five centavos for an errand, or as much as ten or fifteen if it involves any real effort. More than this labels a visitor as foolish and results in a crowd of urchins following along—as hard to shake off as flies before a rain.

Then there is the matter of dress. Good common sense should tell a visitor how to dress in Mexico, just as it should in the United States. To show up in shabby or dirty clothes at a place where everyone else is dressed in their best is a breach of good taste in any country. Likewise, to overdress among people who cannot afford such finery is a poor way to make friends. Most Americans arrive in Mexico for a vacation, and frankly, “don’t give a damn” what other people think of how they dress. They forget that they have a certain responsibility to their own country and good relations in general. One nation learns to like another through individuals.

One-piece bathing suits are worn, sometimes, at the beaches; but it is considered a terrible breach to walk so attired, on the sidewalks. For that matter, slacks, except in the very large cities, are frowned on for street wear, and certainly should not be worn to go calling.

If an American woman traveling in Mexico will follow the one simple rule of asking herself “Would grandmother have done this,” she will make a good impression and get a great deal more out of her trip. Present social standards in Sonora are quite comparable to those of our grandparents: women don’t wear scanty clothes in public places; men don’t speak to women they have not met formally; women do not smoke in public, or enter a bar, unless they are soliciting; formal introductions are necessary for social contacts; unmarried girls do not go unchaperoned, even after they are en-





gaged; and lastly, people simply do not "neck" on park benches in view of others—not even newlyweds.

Many of the quaint old customs of Spain survive in Sonora; the "promenade" around the plaza is one of the most picturesque. Boys, dressed in their best whites, walk round and round the plaza, meeting girls in pairs, or groups. The boys all travel one direction and the girls the other. They speak to each other if they have been introduced, and if a boy is particularly interested in a certain girl he will turn and walk beside her and talk—always, of course, under the watchful eye of some older member of the family who sits on a bench and takes the girl home when the band stops playing. This gives the young folks a chance at the preliminary flirting necessary in Sonoran courtship.

The next step is the "serenata," where the boy, if he has the talent, sings and plays under the girl's window or, if not musically gifted, hires someone to do it for him. This is followed by what is known as "playing the bear." The young couple engages in intimate conversation through the heavily barred window of the girl's room. If the girl listens with approval to the sweet nothings whispered through the bars, the boy formally asks for her hand in marriage, from the father; and the matter is settled.

Many of these customs that are sometimes scoffed at by Americans as silly and outmoded form the core of the way of gracious living which we admire among our Latin neighbors. American movies in the larger towns are gradually making some of the younger set dissatisfied with such arrangements, and the results are mostly tragic.

Small villages in the hills naturally vary in their customs of love-making and marriage, depending on the percentage of Indian blood in the community, and many other things. These customs range all the way from rules that are as strict as the small towns' to the so-called "brush weddings," where the boy simply carries off the girl on his horse and settles the matter without religious or civil ceremony of any sort.

The custom of mourning is everywhere evident in Sonora. The older and more socially prominent families still cling to its strictest observance. If an immediate member of the family dies, the women

all wear black for a whole year and do not go out in public or receive callers. This sort of thing works a good many hardships. In the larger cities it is being gradually modified. In Alamos, however, the "good families" stick to the letter of the law, down to aunts and first cousins. Since families are large, there are a great many black-clad women and girls.

One family I know has three daughters—all lovely girls of marriageable age—but they will probably die old maids. They are the youngest daughters of a family of ten. Their father was the youngest son of a family of twelve and their mother the youngest daughter of a large and apparently unhealthy family. Deaths come along with such discouraging regularity that these girls have been in constant mourning since they were very small. Lingered invalids form a backlog of potential mourning that will probably keep them at it until they are at least thirty-five. Naturally a family cannot celebrate a wedding while in mourning.

Customs in the mountain villages run to such things as dressing the hair differently after a girl has matured physically, and changing the style when she has a lover, and again, after she is married. Some areas carry this as far as the style of clothes, and if one is really up on the rules he can tell at a glance the status of every woman in the community. In one village where I stayed, I discovered a strange variation in these customs. Here, girls and married women alike wear a white blouse and a black heavy wool skirt during their "difficult" time of the month. Their neighbors keep track, and if they miss a month, they either start gossiping or plan a gift for the baby.

All this sort of thing is likely to confuse the casual visitor, and it would seem that the Sonorans have a great many more customs than we. The fact is that we are so used to our customs that we hardly notice them until someone breaks one. Ours would probably seem as odd and useless to a Mexican as many of theirs do to us.

Personally, I have grown to like most of the customs of Sonora. Like ours, there are usually graceful ways around them, when one really gets acquainted. Respect for custom is so strong that the individual custom of a person is inviolate. Tim Turner in his grand



book, *Bullets, Bottles and Gardenias*, tells of how he finally solved a difficult problem by invoking individual custom.

Tim was a war correspondent, covering several revolutions in Mexico. He has a way of making friends by the hundred. South of the border, this called for a good deal of plain two-fisted drinking. Finally he came to the realization that there was a limit to what he could take, and decided to swear off. Whenever some convivial soul would ask him to join him in a libation, Tim would say he had sworn off the stuff. This invariably brought on arguments. If Tim told them his doctor had ordered it, the gay temptor would quote from a dozen medicos on the value of alcohol. Tim even tried saying it was against his religion, only to be bombarded with Bible quotations proving that he was all wrong. Finally a sympathetic friend suggested that when someone offered him a drink he was to say, "Thank you, but it is not my custom." Tim tried it, and the phrase, "Gracias, pero no es mi costumbre," saved him a good many headaches.

I've tried it myself with many variations, and it works every time.

## *Death Comes to Guirocoba*

DEATH came to our little village one day, and I happened along just as it struck. I had been drinking an afternoon cup of coffee with my friend, Doc, sitting at a table under the ramada of poles that connected his three buildings. We were talking of this and that and watching the slow movements of dogs, burros, and people, as they crossed the sunny village square. The warm buzzing of the cicadas in the guayacan trees made a lazy background for the other sounds that filtered through the occasional gaps in our conversation: the soft pat-pat of busy hands, making the evening tortillas; the charter of a caged parrot, next door; a baby, crying somewhere down the road; and the distant laughter and splashing of children, bathing in the arroyo. Peace and contentment had lost their abstract quality; they were physical facts, pervading the very atmosphere.

Suddenly a little boy dashed across the blinding patch of sunlight and came to a stop under the shade, out of breath.

"Doctor," he stammered, "come at once; it is most urgent." Then he turned and ran back the way he came.

"I guess the old boy is going to die, at last," the doctor remarked, as he rose to get his satchel. "The man has an advanced case of dropsy, and he's had it a long time. I knew they wouldn't call me until he was breathing his last. It was too late to do anything, a month ago, but we'll see."

The village had come, suddenly, to life. Sharp cries passed from house to house. People began running from every direction, driving startled pigs, chickens and babies before them. They seemed to be converging on the house where I saw the boy disappear. A crowd was already collecting, in front.

Doc came out, satchel in hand, and put on his white straw hat. He seemed not to be in a hurry, and I could understand why. If he got there before the man died, he would have to treat him and then, when he died—which was a pretty certain eventuality—he would get the blame.

Looking over the shoulders of the assembled spectators, I could see a corner of the rawhide bed where the patient lay in front of the house. A feeble hand rose from the sheet and dropped again, with a convulsive finality that could mean only one thing. Doc had guessed absolutely right.

One of the women stepped closer and pulled the sheet over the still warm corpse, and started to wail. The rest of the women joined with an elemental violence and volume that was staggering. Someone came out of the house and began firing homemade rocket crackers into the air, to scare away the devils. The wailing (if such a thing was possible) became louder, and I turned and worked my way out of the crowd. It would have made "mood music" for a scene from Dante's *Inferno*.

Later in the afternoon, I went by the place again. The wailing had subsided to occasional sobs. The corpse lay, shrouded, on the bed where he had died, under the shade of the ramada. Two girls were taking turns shooing the flies with palm leaves. Things remained comparatively quiet until another group of relatives arrived, from over the mountain. Then the wailing would start up again, and continue until the mourners, one by one, subsided; overcome by grief and perspiration.

That night, Doc took me to the wake. The population of the village had doubled, thanks to the brush-telegraph; and most of them were in attendance. We brought gifts of candles and gave them to the old woman, who had a row already lighted, surrounding the corpse. We seated ourselves as quietly as possible, after shaking hands and exchanging condolences with the principal mourners. The crude rawhide bed that the man had used in life formed a bier in the center of a large circle. The candles, set about two feet apart, lighted up the white-shrouded figure, which almost seemed to stir at times when a light breeze fluttered the flames.

Everyone sat quietly, gazing at the body, while two black-clad

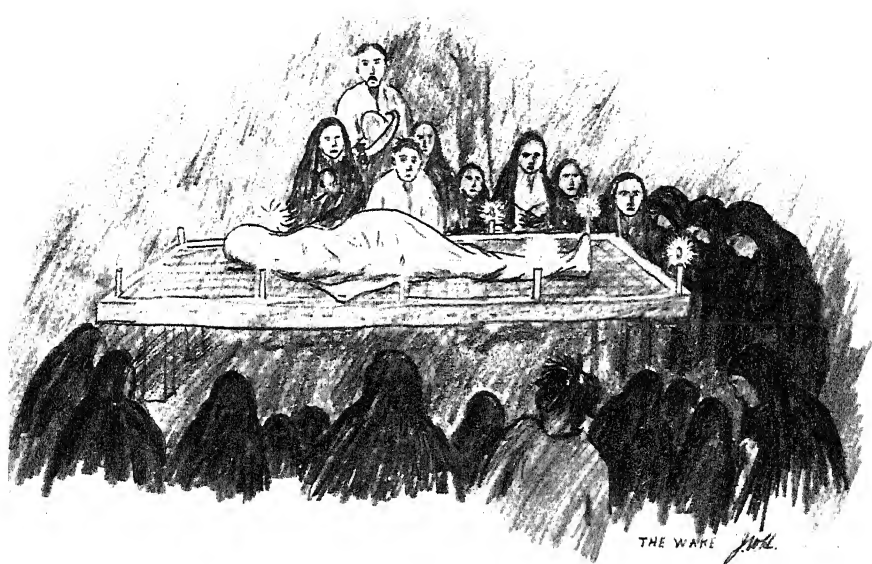
old women kneeled at the foot of the bed, and mumbled in unison what sounded like "highly Indianized" Latin prayers. From time to time the old woman with the candles would rise and replace one, sticking it to the soft wax left by its predecessor. The wind sighed, softly, in the cypress trees, and the candlelight cast weird shadows on the faces of the mourners.

Out in the yard, stretched on the ground, lay the twelve sleeping pallbearers. They needed that sleep! On the morrow their job would be to carry the heavy cypress coffin, with its obese occupant, six miles over the mountain to his birthplace, at Agua Caliente. They would work in relays over the hot trail. Every spot where they could set the coffin down for a "breather" would have to be marked by a commemorative pile of stones. Being a pallbearer in Sonora is more than a gesture to a dead friend. I marveled at their ability to relax and go right to sleep there on the hard ground. Patches of moonlight glittered through the trees on their white-clad bodies and their white straw sombreros. They were all dressed to take their friend on his last journey.

Doc had looked worried ever since we arrived, and now and then I noticed him get up and engage in a very earnest whispered conversation with one or another of the male mourners. Finally, I asked him what the trouble was. He answered that, after all, the man had died of dropsy and it was in the middle of the summer. The night was warm and the body was swelling. It seems that Clay had been trying to get them to cut the affair short, and put the man in his coffin while they could still do it without someone sitting on the lid while they nailed it down. The mourners were adamant on going through the forms of the thing, regardless of extenuating circumstances. The praying went monotonously on, punctuated by the clumsy hammering of the boys in the next yard, who were finishing the coffin. Every once in a while Doc would nudge me and say:

"Gosh, look at that bird swell! That sheet's getting tighter around his middle, every minute. If he explodes before they get him buried tomorrow, they can't say I didn't warn them."

Finally, the praying stopped and the crowd seemed to relax. Here and there could be heard whispers or mumbled conversations.



THE WAKE *J.W.L.*



Children began to play on the edge of the crowd. A baby stirred restlessly and whimpered in its mother's arms. The mother unbuttoned her blouse and the child nursed. In a few minutes they were both asleep. Old heads began to nod and children curled, like puppies at their mother's feet, to sleep as naturally as if they had been at home. The breeze still sighed in the cypress trees by the arroyo.

Such is the passing of a mountain villager. In the morning the body in its coffin is decorated with a length of black rope. Close friends pass by for a final farewell, and each ties a knot in the rope and lays it gently back. Each knot is a handhold on a rope ladder to heaven. More firecrackers are shot off, to frighten spirits, as the lid is nailed down and the funeral procession is off over the long hot trail.

Each night, for nine nights, the same two old women pray at the house for the rest of the dead man's soul, and on the ninth night a steer is butchered for a feast. Then the assembled relatives and friends go home, and the funeral is over. A year later, another fiesta is held to commemorate the first anniversary of his passing; and each year, on Dia Muertis (November 20th), candles are burned on all the village graves and a big dance and fiesta follow.

Doc had been telling me these things in low whispers, as we sat in the sleepy crowd and watched the first pale light come into the eastern sky. We were getting too sleepy to see the thing through, as others were who had been quietly leaving in small groups.

As we walked away, I looked back on the scene. The candles still flickered on the rawhide bed, lighting the faces of the mourners, drawn with grief and fatigue. The hammering of the coffin-makers had stopped echoing through the silent village, and the pallbearers still slept in the dusty yard. A rooster crowed somewhere across the arroyo.

## *Ride to Sinaloa*

ON MY first trip into Sonora, I had ridden the trail south to the Sinaloa border; but I was in a hurry and there were a great many points along the trail that I wished to stop and see, but time would not permit.

Now we were on the ranch for the entire summer, and time was the one thing that we had plenty of. The final excuse for going on the old trail came, one day, when I remembered a rare night-blooming cereus cluster that I had passed that first early morning. I had been reading up on this genus of cactus, since, and was convinced that this was a new species. We decided to make a day of collecting. The next morning we started off to the south—Eunice, my son Philip, and myself—followed by Chico, one of the ranch mozos, and a pack mule with two gasoline crates, to carry back cactus specimens.

The first little village south was Caliente, named after its fine hot springs, which gushed full-fledged from a round hole in the volcanic rock. The women of the village were busily washing clothes and told us how very fortunate they were to have hot water, where most of their sisters had to do all their washings in a "cold stream." Then, too, it made for a great deal more cleanliness than most villages could boast. Here, it was possible to bathe in comfort the year around. The water was almost boiling, where it emerged, and cooled as it traveled from pool to pool to the arroyo below. The bather or washer could choose the temperature best suited to the mood or the weather.

We were just about to leave the friendly little village when a



boy came up with two little spotted fawns. They were the most graceful and beautifully marked animals we had ever seen in Sonora. Philip fell in love with them at first sight and wanted to buy them both. The boy wanted only a peso apiece. It took a great deal to argue him (and secretly myself) into understanding that the Hilton family did not have any place in its pattern for two pet Sonoran brush buck, no matter how charming. I don't know which of our party was saddest as we watched the small boy, standing there behind us with the two pet deer. Even the fawns looked a little forlorn, and the disappointment of the small boy was apparent in every feature of his round little face.

Out of Caliente about a mile, we came upon the cactus fence that had astounded me on my first trip. The rock fences of the region are common and sometimes run for many miles without a break, but this fence was different. It bordered one side of the trail, up one hill and down the other, with a collection of plants that would have been the envy of any botanic garden in the world. The ranchers had simply planted six- or seven-foot cuttings of whatever cereus type was growing nearest, and they had taken root to form a solid growing wall. On some stretches hundreds of feet were fenced with the rare *Cephalocereus leucocephalus*. The natives call it "pitaya barbona," or bearded pitaya, because the southwest side of each stem is covered with a white mass of vegetable wool, about six inches long. It is through this wool that the flowers and fruits form. Some botanists explain this odd hair on certain cactus as a natural protection against creeping insects, such as ants and beetles, that would otherwise destroy the flowers before they could mature fruits. I doubt if there are more than three hundred specimens of this plant in cultivation, outside of its native area; yet, here, we were riding past thousands of them, much larger and finer than any ever brought to a botanic garden.

The cactus finally gave way to a rock fence. It is hard to visualize, even when you gaze upon them, how many man-hours it took in the early days to erect these mortarless stone fences around the great haciendas. It was done by semi-slave labor for the early conquistadores. They had three reasons: one, to mark the land; another, to clear it; and a third, to apply the early Spaniards' feeling

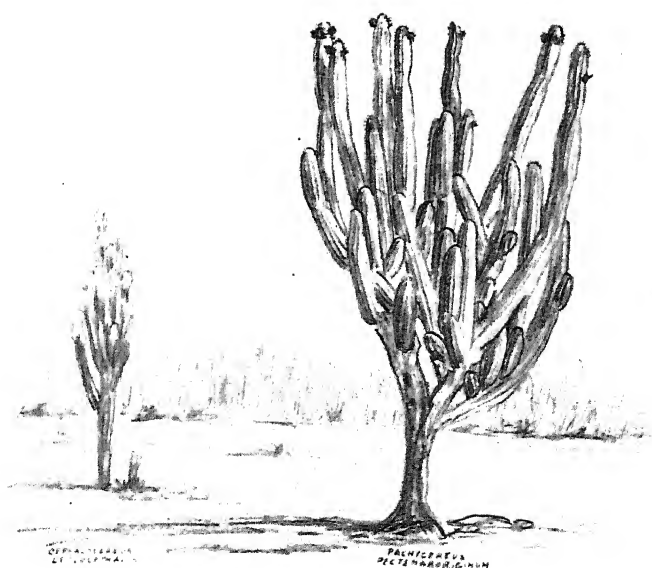
that the harder the Indians were made to work, the less trouble they would give the newcomers.

Chico was an excellent guide. He knew all the fruit trees and plants along the trail; what they were good for, and the Mexican and Indian names. At one point on the trail he led us up a side canyon to a giant ficus tree of a species that we had not seen. A flock of green parrots flew up with such loud shrieking that we could hardly hear each other talk. They were attracted by the small fruits. Chico assured us that these fruits were wonderful. They were hard to get, for the parrots had been there first; but finally he secured some, by climbing an adjacent tree and reaching into the low overhanging branches. The fruits were almost black, and a little smaller than an English walnut. The texture and flavor were a little disappointing, but we ate our share, just the same, for Chico had gone to a great deal of trouble to get them for us. They were a little drier and tougher than a cultivated fig, with a pungent flavor that might be very good after an appetite had been cultivated for it.

The tree itself was worth walking many times the distance to see. Its great trunk looked like a thousand braided and twisted ropes that had finally grown together. Here and there a mass of roots touched the ground from a large overhanging branch and formed additional supporting trunks, like a banyan tree.

In the shade below it, on the rocky banks of the little canyon, was a collection of ferns and orchids that would have stopped traffic in front of any florist's window in the United States. In one of the trees, nearby, was a cluster of small sweet-scented orchids, that one could smell fifty feet away. They were bright yellow, about the size of a quarter, with brownish black pencillings. The odor resembled vanilla—with a touch of something else that I find no words to describe.

The little stream at the bottom of the canyon was only about a foot wide, but we saw three different species of small fishes swimming about. An aquarist could add some rather attractive new varieties to his collection, in this country. Most of the fishes were small and used to close quarters. They would adapt themselves to aquarium culture, readily. One species was particularly interesting





at this spot. The males were only about three-quarters of an inch long, and a third of this was tail. They were jet black, with iridescent blue on the edges of the tails and fins. The females that they were courting were at least two inches long, with short fins and tails. They were the color of mother-of-pearl, with tiny black or brown specks, irregularly, scattered over the upper parts of their bodies. If it had not been the mating season, I am sure we would never have recognized the fact that they belonged to the same species. Like many of the small Sonoran fishes, they are live bearers, giving birth to a litter of from a dozen to fifty small, perfectly formed fishes which arrive in pairs over a period of several hours.

Brilliant long-tailed jays flew ahead of us for miles, shrieking a warning to all other wild life that man was on the move. We did not see a single deer and hardly any birds after these fellows started escorting us, but their antics were worth the loss. They would keep just ahead of us, flitting from tree to tree with their long tails undulating behind, like something that has been artificially attached. The tails of the males were fully one and a half times as long as the bodies. When they lit for a moment on a branch, they were just as likely to hold on upside down as right side up, and swing back and forth on the limb like circus performers on a trapeze. It seemed they were trying to do everything in their power to entertain and distract us while they kept up a lusty shrieking, to warn all the other denizens of the thorn forest that we were approaching.

Finally, the wash widened and we smelled wood smoke and the odors of cooking ahead. We emerged from the trees into a small village, surrounded by fields of waving corn. Everyone was friendly to us while Chico passed on all of the local news:

"Ah, there, Rosa, your sister at Guirocoba had her baby last night. It was a big strong boy. A rider from Alamos says that the corn to the north is poor because of light rain, so the price will be up this fall. Tell Maria that her father has the paludismo, and the fever is very high. José's cow had twin calves, both spotted. The small son of Pablo Reys, at Agua Caliente, fell from an uvalama tree, and broke his arm. Word comes from Joaquin Hernandez in Alamos, that he will pay four pesos for good ocelot hides."

Here, before our eyes, we had an example of the "brush telegraph" in operation. In such a manner our own forefathers disseminated the vital news in the wilderness. It was like turning back time a hundred years.

Green corn was not yet in, and the old corn from last year was used up, so the village was living largely on the wild things that could be gathered. A species of pigweed, called "calites," made up a great deal of their diet, with what few wild roots they could dig, and game that could be trapped or shot, if they should be fortunate enough to have a little ammunition. This time of year is usually rather "triste" for the back-country folks; such food does not take the place of good solid tortillas and beans. Especially, small children are stricken with violent diarrhea which is often fatal. When the corn crop does come in, triste or sad times will all be forgotten. Instead of laying by plenty, to carry the family through till next harvest, most of them will sell more than they should, in Alamos, and spend the money on a fiesta.

From the village on, we rode through a veritable bower of flowers. The ground was carpeted with millions of bright yellow cosmos. Almost every bush and tree bore either flowers of its own or vines that were a riot of bloom. Vines of the "antigonon" or queen's wreath, covered giant trees with their masses of cerise blossoms. I have seen this plant in cultivation in Hawaii and California, but here it ran riot, making masses of color that almost hurt your eyes. Chico gathered flowers and decorated the horses' bridles; even the sad-looking mule was suddenly glamorized with a colorful corsage. We were practically a parade, as we rode through the next settlement and stopped off long enough for Chico to relay and receive all of the current vital statistics.

Finally we saw the promontory ahead that marks the Sinaloa border, and soon we were resting under the shade of flowering trees, beside running water. I climbed the side hill to see if the cluster of rare *Acanthocereus* was still there, while Eunice got out our lunch. The cacti were still there, just as I had first seen them, years before. They were totally different from any others in the area, and I set about making cuttings, to take back on the burro.

After lunch, Chico started back with the burro, loaded with

plants, and we went in for a swim in the stream. It was a beautiful spot, and the weather had been kind. Not a rain cloud loomed on the horizon, to threaten us with an afternoon wetting.

In the still pools of the stream were still other varieties of small fishes which were, indeed, interesting to watch. One type in particular, a species of *chicld*, was worth the whole trip. These little fellows were breeding in the shallow clear water and seemed not to mind us much as we watched. All stages of their nesting were to be seen in a few feet of water. We amused ourselves watching their life history unfold.

The males were resplendent with orange bands on their bodies, and greenish-blue edges to their fins; while the females were a rather dull brown. The thing that struck us first was the fact that the males were able to alter and increase the color of their bands at an instant's notice. Sometimes the orange would fade until it was just a lighter band on the brown background of the fish; but when the male was near his nest or was approached by another male, the colors flamed to intense hues.

The nests were cleared spots on the sandy bottom where a small patch of eggs had been deposited. Like many of their family, these *chicld*s share all the parental duties and take turns fanning eggs with their tails to keep the water circulating. While one is thus occupied, the other is busily darting this way and that at any intruding fish, to clear an area about two feet in diameter. It was here that the males showed their most beautiful colorings.

Other nests had hatched and the parents were herding their young about in little schools. The babies formed a small gray cloud in the water, behind the mother, while the father darted in circles about them in a one-man fighter escort. We wondered as we sat and watched this little drama, how many people had crossed this stream without knowing the wonders of its aquatic life, too busy or hurried to stop and quietly watch. We wished, as we had many times before, for a moving-picture outfit with lenses capable of capturing this sort of thing in a color movie. It would be nice to share such moments with classes of natural history and nature clubs in the States.

Finally we started home, having discovered that the sun had

been traveling on, all this time. We would never be able to make the return trip in daylight. Darkness overtook us, just out of the village of Agua Caliente, with its characteristic suddenness, in these latitudes. One minute it was light; the next, the sun went down and it was dark. There was no twilight. Soon I began to wonder if it had been a good idea to send Chico ahead. As soon as we got into the deep canyon the trail became something that we had to believe in, without seeing. There was no moon and the rich growth, overhead, screened out any starlight that might have helped. Small noises along the trail seemed magnified many times. Somewhere, not too far away, I heard the coughing of a jaguar. The fact that there had been cattle killed between Caliente and Guirocoba the last few nights brought home the realization that these big cats were in the community, in force, and on the hunt. As usual, we carried no gun of any sort.

There was nothing to do but give my horse his head and trust his instinct to get us home. The other horses followed, and we felt our way along under the giant trees. Now and then I would call back to tell Eunice and Philip to duck for a branch that had caught me in the face. We couldn't make very good time.

Someone had told me, once, that jaguars would not bother people if they whistled, so I started whistling as merry a tune as I could. This reminded me of another, and the first thing I knew I was singing and the family joining in. I am sure we all forgot whatever dangers the trail might have held, as we sang together to the rhythm of our horses' feet.

Sometimes the trail followed the stream bed, and other stretches were along steep high banks, where we could hear the rushing water below, like distant thunder. The horses were good. They never seemed to falter or miss a step. Now and then we would enter clearings that were illuminated with the largest and brightest fireflies that I have ever seen. They were so thick that they would actually light on us and our horses. The lights were in pairs, pointed down. They went on and off with the mathematical regularity of an electric advertisement. Each one would light up an area about a foot in diameter, bright enough to see in detail. I doubt if we shall ever see a more weirdly beautiful sight than those glow-



ing insects made, as they illuminated small bits of the forest about us.

My horse stopped in the trail, and I could hear by the rushing of the water that here was the place where we had forded the stream in the morning. In the daylight there had been nothing to it but here, in almost total darkness, the thing took on a different aspect. I wished for a little moonlight or even a couple of the fireflies we had left behind, but here was nothing but darkness and hulking forms of huge cypress trunks and the sound of angry water. I remembered from the morning that there was just one narrow trail cleared across the stream. Above and below this ford was a mass of foaming water and jagged boulders that it would be impossible for the horses to survive.

My mount seemed to be smelling the ground, along the bank, so I gave him all the rein. Presently he seemed to find the right spot and, raising his head, started across. The other horses followed. Water boiled up under the horses' bellies and we pulled our feet up, to keep dry as possible. They came through without a hitch or a stumble.

The average Sonora horse wouldn't look like much at a stock show, or win any prizes at a race track; but, if they were having a contest of equine I.Q., I would enter a wiry little buckskin stallion from Sonora. After that night, the phrase "horse sense" took on a great deal more meaning for me.

One more low hill through lighter trees, and we were looking down on the village of Guirocoba. The flicker of cookfires sparkled from some of the thatched houses, and here and there a brighter light from an open doorway indicated that the occupants could afford the luxury of a kerosene lamp. Over to the right we could see the still brighter lights from the ranch house and, at the gate, a lantern that Mac had hung to welcome us. It had been a wonderful ride; one we would never forget.

## *The Social Aspects of Carrying Water*

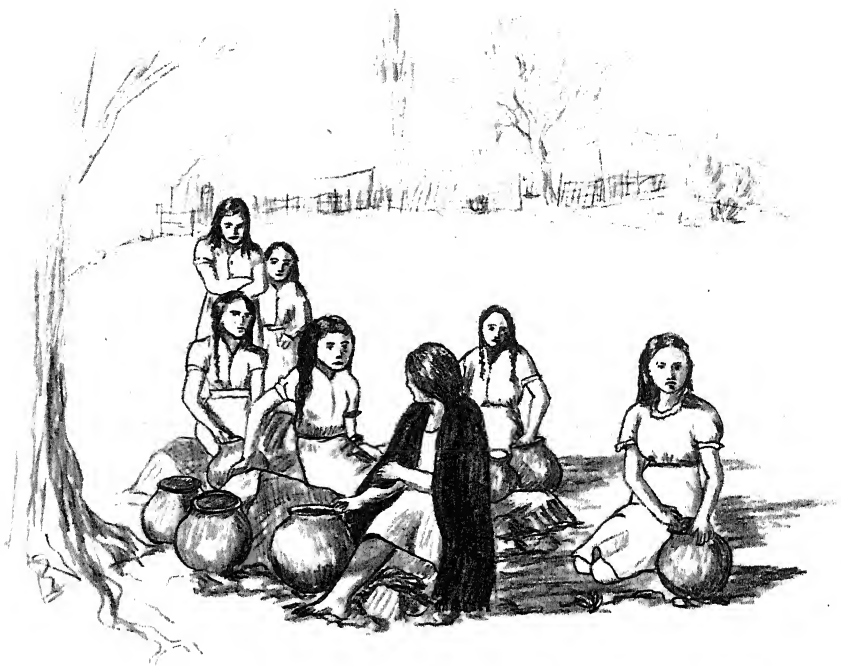
AS I leaf through my sketchbook I find dozens of drawings of girls carrying water. No other single subject in Sonora offers such a variety of line and color to tempt the artist. The varicolored dresses on lithe, graceful forms draped with the black rebosa are decorative indeed.

"She is dressed fit to carry water" is a common compliment in the hill country. Little goes on of a social nature in the back-country villages. No cathedral to attend on Sunday, no plaza to walk around, no "promenada" of an evening, no theaters or other places of amusement where girls of marriageable age can put in their appearance.

This is the one chance a young girl has to walk through the village, where the boys can look her over and possibly indulge in a bit of surreptitious flirting. With a water jar on her head, treading flatfooted up the trail, shoulders thrown back, chin up, pretending to look only straight ahead, a girl looks her best—and she knows it.

Then there is the gossip angle. In a little settlement in Sonora, just as in small communities in this country, there is an intense interest in all the minute details of the doings of everyone else. The water hole is a clearing house for all this and goes a long way toward taking the place of ladies' aid societies or bridge parties. Here are discussed such vital subjects as: When is Juanita expecting her baby, and will it be a boy or a girl? How has Pedro been behaving since his wife went to the other village to take care of her sick mother? How in the world does Lolita expect to find herself a decent husband after treating Juanito the way she did? What on









earth do you suppose was in the letter that Margarita got from her Aunt in Sinaloa?

In short, the conversation runs along practically the same channels as feminine discussion in any country—with the exception that they give a great deal more emphasis to the minute and tragic details of some late neighbor's last moments, which of course have been witnessed by half the members of the village. Death seems to be a favorite subject, with sickness and childbirth running a close second, followed by love and infidelity, and all the other things that, in cities, become nothing but vital statistics.

When gossip runs short or the men are away working in the field, the young daughters forget to carry water. But let there be a death, a birth, a wedding, or the advent of a stranger, and all the spare ollas in the house are filled and every plant in the dooryard is watered twice a day. One old lady in a mountain village said she was sure glad that our party had come their way, for now she didn't have to beg the girls to carry water.

It seems a nice custom, but I wish the girls would not give up their earthen ollas for the five-gallon gasoline cans that seem so much in favor wherever they are obtainable. I solved this situation in Guirocoba in a few days by never sketching a girl who was carrying a can, and by making considerable fuss over how beautiful the ollas were, asking first this and then that girl to pose with her water jar on her lap or balanced on her head. In less than a week the tin cans had entirely disappeared from the water hole.

Water in most cases is not taken directly from the stream itself but from "positas." These are little pits dug by the girls in the gravel shore into which the water filters and is thus further purified. On their first trip every morning they dig out and bail each "posita," to be sure that it is clean. Then they sit around and discuss any choice bits of gossip while the pools fill. The equipment for carrying water in the hills consists of three items: the olla, usually a graceful earthen jar holding three to four gallons, and locally made; the gourd dipper, cut from a bottle gourd grown on the fence near the hut; and the rebosa. The latter is usually black or dark blue, sometimes brown. It is worn draped gracefully over head and shoulders, and if the girl be shy, the folds are drawn in

such a way that it is hard to get more than a glance of her face as she passes. They are probably one of the world's most effective devices for flirting. Poems are written about them by the yard. "Thy rebosa moves reluctantly" is the way of telling a girl how lovely she is.

After the water hole has been cleared with the gourd dipper and the olla filled, a girl coils either a portion of her rebosa, or another piece of dark cloth which she has for that purpose, into a round nest for the top of her head. Then she carefully lifts the jar to her head and adjusts the rebosa over her shoulders so that it exposes just enough of her profile to arouse interest. Some carry the olla on their shoulders, but this is a bad practice, as it does as much harm to the carriage as carrying on the head does good.

Very young girls often carry these large loads and have to help each other get the heavy ollas up off the ground. In such cases carrying on the shoulder is likely to throw the whole framework of their body out of balance, with serious results later in life.

All in all, it's quite an institution, carrying water. It will probably survive for a long time. One very famous household is said to have suffered a "feminine general strike" because sudden riches caused the father to indulge in the unheard-of luxury of piping water right into the house. The women were aghast. It was not customary! What would they do with their time? They called a meeting and decided that they would do no more cooking, baking, washing, or any of the other things that were considered their duties until the innovation was removed. Plumbing is going to encounter quite a sales resistance in the rural sections of Sonora.



## *My Friend Don X*

*ALTHOUGH* this drawing is not of my friend Don X, it reminds me a great deal of him. I met him on my first trip into Mexico by stumbling into his shop to get out of a sudden rain.

He sat in the corner of his small place behind a counter littered with boxes of hooks and eyes, braid, pins, needles, pen points, and firecrackers such as are used to frighten devils from the newly dead. An old lady had obviously been pawing over these articles for a considerable time, and could not make up her mind how to spend the few centavos she had wrapped tightly in her handkerchief.

I caught a slight trace of exasperation in the shopkeeper's voice, but his face held a serene expression of resignation that made my heart bleed. He looked up from the transaction like a person who had been trapped into an interminable chess game by a fiend on the subject and would welcome fire, flood, or 'quake if it would but break up the game.

He greeted me with the almost too perfect English of a well educated Mexican.

"You are welcome, sir. Please have a seat here until the rain stops. What part of the States are you from? Did you come by train or by auto?"

I was somewhat taken aback by the greeting, but answered that I lived in the desert part of California, and had driven all the way.

"Someday I am going back to California," he sighed, "but not to the desert. That is too much like Sonora. I like it around San Francisco. My father sent me to school there."

The old woman looked a little hurt, and asked something about a box on the shelf directly back of him.

"Those are paper clips, Señora. I am sure that you wouldn't possibly care for them; but if you wish to look them over, here they are." He added the box to the general assortment in front of her.

I looked around. The shelves were literally groaning with the darnedest assortment I had ever seen: lamp wicks, iodine, aspirin, pictures of Saints, candles, dressmaker's notions, guitar strings, writing-materials, account books, small hardware, tools, and sewing machine parts. The ceiling was hung with kerosene lanterns, hats, bunches of the rocketlike firecrackers, rope, machetes without handles, horseshoes and a lot of things that I couldn't identify.

"Yes, I have quite a variety in this little shop," he said, following my eyes. "One has to have, to make a living with these people who come in from the villages, and the few customers here in town."

He left the old lady to her devices; and we talked of California and the United States, of the places he had been, and the people he knew. Finally, the talk swung to philosophy; and he had me stumped. He could quote any philosopher of any age. He was hungry for a listener, and talked and talked. He was interesting.

Then he changed to music. He asked about the "Hollywood Symphonies Under the Stars." "Had I attended any of them?" I told him, that was one of the things we liked best about going to Los Angeles. He pulled a dog-eared copy of the *Los Angeles Times* from under the counter.

"I get an occasional American newspaper," he said, "and I read every word of it." His enthusiasm was touching.

The rain had stopped, and he was being interrupted. He waited on a little girl who wanted a pint of kerosene, a boy who came for half a kilo of crude sugar and half a kilo of unroasted coffee, a farmer who stopped in for a new tip for his plow.

The more the man talked, the more I was amazed. He had studied both in Mexico and the United States. He held university degrees. He was a violinist and poet. Gradually the picture patched together. His father had been a wealthy landowner. The education





and musical training had come before the land had been taken for the Agrarians. Now he was reduced to this little store, financed by what had been salvaged from his father's estate. He had never married. He hadn't the money to marry one of his own class, and knew better than to marry out of it and continue to live in the community.

He was an altogether charming fellow, and a real find. He knew the history and customs of his own country, and the habits and crafts of the Indians in the hills. He could tell me the things I wanted to know about the early days of the silver-mining boom in Sonora. All in all, I felt that it was a fortunate rain that had driven me through his door.

Finally, the old lady signified that she had made up her mind about her purchases. She took six firecrackers, a small mirror, a candle for her favorite Saint, and—out of stubbornness I am sure—a half dozen paper clips. I asked if he had any carbon paper and he showed me a very good brand, which I had been unable to purchase in the larger cities. The shadows were getting long when I looked out into the street, and I realized that I had spent the afternoon.

My friendship and admiration for Don X grew each time I saw him, and, along with them, a certain sense of unreality that I could not quite define. The next time I came into his shop he was alone, and there, on the counter before him, were papers littered with problems in solid geometry.

"Mental exercise," he explained, smiling, as he shoved them to one side.

Another time it was the lives of the Caesars, in Latin. It was hard to visualize a man doing this sort of thing for mental exercise. I caught a glimpse one Sunday of the maiden sister with whom he lived. She never left the house, except to go to Mass. The realization came to me that he could not afford anything else in the way of books, to drive off sheer boredom, so he read and reread his college books, and worked and reworked the mathematical problems.

Sometimes we would talk together in his store and sometimes we would meet in the evening at the Plaza. He was a great help to me with my Spanish, and a joy to converse with on any subject.

I remarked to some of his neighbors what a fine education he had, and they snapped back:

"What has it gotten him?"

I assured them that I believed it had gotten him a great deal. To others, I mentioned what a perfect gentleman he was, and invariably I got the same answer.

"Pues si. He is a perfect gentleman almost always." But they all declined further comment.

I was away from his town for several months, and when I returned I hastened down to his little store. I had brought him some American magazines. The place was closed in mid-forenoon. It wasn't a holiday. I inquired if he was sick, and his friends said, No; and smiled. Finally I asked one, point-blank, where I could find him, and he answered: "If you must know, Señor; he is either inside the cantina, if he has found someone to buy him a drink, or outside, looking for another."

I was shocked. Several times I had offered Don X a drink, and he had always politely refused. I had the impression that he was a total abstainer.

Sure enough, he was in front of the cantina, looking pretty dejected. He pulled himself together when he recognized me, and started right in talking about poetry, philosophy and the arts—a little too fast, a little too glib—but still perfectly lucid. Suddenly he sighed and got up.

"My friend," he said, "there is no use any longer deceiving you, or perhaps I have not been deceiving. At any rate, in case you have not already gathered as much, I am as drunk as the proverbial fiddler's bitch; and I intend to stay that way for some time. I am temporarily out of funds, as my sister has locked me out of the house. I really need another drink. Would it be presuming too much on our friendship to ask for the loan of five pesos?"

I produced the loan. The loss of his old life, the boredom of women who bought two centavos' worth of thread, the loneliness, and the maiden sister had finally gotten him down. Even Plato and solid geometry could not help. We went in and ordered a couple of straight ones.

## *A Night in the Yaqui Country*

A SKETCH of a sunrise on the Yaqui River reminds me well of a night when I crossed that same river in the company of what must have been either the greatest authority on Yaquis in Sonora or one of the ablest liars. As I look back I feel that he was probably a well balanced blend of both.

As I recall, the night was a black tunnel roofed by threatening clouds, walled by giant cacti, and carpeted with dust. This dust welled up in powdery swirls, seeped through the floor boards, sifted in by each crack, and settled in a drab gray film on everything in sight. Occasionally a flash of distant lightning illuminated the forest of giant cacti. Gnarled trunks and tortured arms groping skyward, struggling to outreach one another, grasping for the rain that was about to come.

We were trying to beat this rain to the border. That is one of the few reasons why a sane person would attempt this road at night. To be trapped by the rain was the greater of two evils. The talkative individual we had picked up in Ciudad Obregón assured us that there was no actual danger in such a journey.

"Especially with me along," he said. "Why, I've traveled this Yaqui desert at night on horseback when war was brewing, and never got so much as a scratch. The Yaquis like me, they do, and I like them; the darned wooden-faced heathen."

Our feeling of general security was shaken, however, when he insisted on stopping at the first fort, and gave our names and car license to the Comandante. This fellow favored us with an incredulous look that changed to something between pity and disgust when we insisted upon going on through the night. It was hard for him

to understand why "these crazy Americanos" would gamble a night in the Yaqui country against a few weeks' delay.

"These Mexicans," said our friend, "are afraid of the Yaquis, and the Yaquis like to keep them that way. A well planned atrocity goes a long way toward preserving general respect.

"A common thing in the past was to catch a party of foolhardy prospectors or military scouts who were thought to be intruding too far into their country. Two or three were picked out for torture and death, and the others turned loose to tell the story.

"Did I ever tell you about any of their pet ways of making folks uncomfortable? Well, take the 'cholla dance' for instance. Now, there is a thing that only a Yaqui could have thought up. They put a fellow in a ring covered with joints of cholla cactus (you know what that stuff is—Americans call it 'jumping cactus,' the orn'riest thing that grows from the ground). Then they take his clothes off, including his shoes, and start up the music. The poor feller is supposed to dance or else—and if he doesn't, they start shooting at his feet.

"Some of the victims live through the cholla dance, but the Yaquis use another desert plant that really kills them. You know the mescal or agave (folks in the States call 'em century plants)—well, they find one that is about ready to bloom and they rig up a sort of framework over the plant directly above the flower shoot. The fellow they want to do away with is tied with rawhide to the frame, and the shoot does the rest. You know how hard the tips of those shoots are, and they're just as sharp as a needle. Nothing can stop their growth, since they have waited for years to bloom, and all that energy is stored up and has to be released somehow. They grow at the rate of about eighteen inches a night and will pass right through a man and go on and bloom.

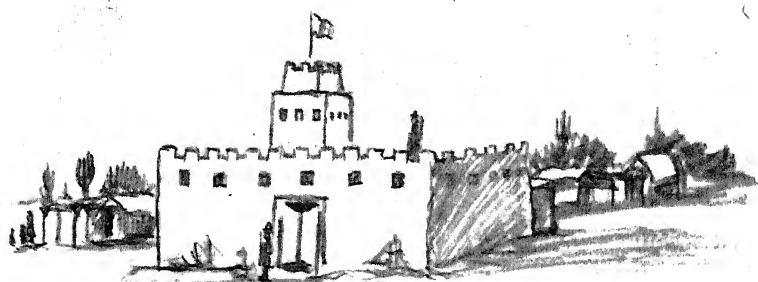
"Then of course there is the old torture of tying a man in a freshly skinned cowhide: the next day the sun comes out, the rawhide shrinks, and the man is slowly crushed; or the pleasant little stunt of staking an enemy out on an ant hill where the stinging ants start the job and the buzzards finish up.

"The guys they turn loose aren't exactly in perfect shape when they finally get back to civilization. The Yaquis usually mark them





RIO YAQUI





up some, such as a cut across the cheek or forehead, or lopping off an ear. This is a lifetime ad for the Indians. Anyone meeting the poor fellows is apt to ask how they became mutilated, and the story is told again. This custom has done more than all the wars to keep the Yaqui country for the Yaqui.

"Sometimes it doesn't work out so well, however, especially if one of the victims happens to be well known in Mexico City. Then of course a punitive expedition is sent out. By the sheer strength of superior force the Yaqui domain is penetrated and retribution is meted out. Homes and villages are burned, and women and children mercilessly abused. The Yaquis hold a war council and usually retaliate. This may go on for years.

"During the last Yaqui war one would no more have attempted to pass over this road at night than to walk barefooted through a den of rattlesnakes. Military escorts took travelers from one fort to another, checking in each member of the party carefully to account for everyone. One station had as many as half a dozen Yaquis, each hanging from a telephone pole in plain sight of the railway and road, as a warning to their pals and temptation to the flocks of buzzards that could hardly wait till they were cut down."

I began to wonder just how wise we had been to attempt this trip through the night, and occasionally I would glance at my wife to see how she was taking the cheerful conversation of our friend. Being a nurse, she wasn't easily upset. I decided to let good enough alone. After all we couldn't just tell the man to shut up and stop getting on our nerves. He might be easily offended, and decide to leave us at the next fort. There was little to do but suffer in silence, and wonder at times whether all these things of which he spoke really could have happened. Then when we would glance out of the car at the shadowy thorn forest, hedging us in on both sides, it seemed that nothing could be too sinister for such a place.

"In spite of all precautions," our guide continued, "attacks were sometimes made on escorted parties. I recall a woman now living in Alamos. They say she is very beautiful and, although over forty, still looks the sixteen years she was when the Yaquis ambushed their party. The soldiers were overpowered and killed by torture, one by one, before her eyes.

"Her two brothers were then led out and tied where they could watch the proceedings while she was stripped and raped by a dozen of the paint-smeared savages. Finally, unconscious and mutilated, she was abandoned for dead, and her two brothers were turned loose to tell the tale, after each had lost an ear. They discovered that their sister still breathed and, tying her to a horse, they took her home.

"This woman, they say, was crazy from that day on and has to be kept locked up or blindfolded so that she may not see any man. Even the sight of a man of her own family starts her screaming and raving. The queer thing seems to be that she somehow doesn't appear to age a bit."

Our cheerful friend was about to start on another of his stories when a flash of lightning showed us that the Yaqui River was ahead. "I hope the rains in the hills yesterday have raised it high enough for the 'pongos,'" he said, "for if they haven't we are likely to get stuck trying to cross."

Suddenly my headlights picked out a group of figures standing silently near the roadside at the river's edge. They were Yaquis all right! Perhaps the fears of the Comandante hadn't been so foolish; here we were face to face with the real things. We stopped and a tall wooden-faced giant stuck his head into the window on my wife's side of the car.

"Can we cross the river safely?" I asked (by way of starting some sort of conversation).

The Indian kept on staring.

"Couldn't your men push us through? How much would they charge?"

"Fifty pesos," grunted the Yaqui.

"Fifty pesos!" exclaimed our companion. "Why, that is an outrage. Where is your head man? I want to talk to him."

The crowd stirred, and an older man approached to see who dared speak with such authority. Our friend got out and greeted this fellow in a guttural language that must have been Yaqui, for the other's expression changed to one of recognition. He took our companion's hand in his and the conversation continued, but it sounded friendly.

Finally the old man shouted something that was apparently an order. The men began removing their sandals and rolling up their trouser legs. Taking hold of the car, they pushed us bodily across the wide shallow stream.

"What do we owe you?" I asked as the man again approached the car.

"Nada," he replied, with what must have been meant for a gallant gesture.

I proffered a five-peso note. He was about to refuse it when our friend spoke up (this time in Spanish).

"Por los niños," he said (for the little ones); "they will be waiting for your return, and some small trinkets from the market will please them."

The old man's leathery face broke into the first real smile we had seen that evening. He accepted the bill with a polite "gracias," and his men shouted their wishes that we "travel in safety with the presence of God."

"You see," said our companion, "they are just like a lot of children. True, they are badly spoiled children at times, but they can be handled without much trouble if one tries to understand them. If the Mexicans would recognize this fact and stay away from their gold-laden Bacatete Mountains, there would be little friction with the Yaqui people. I have learned that, once their natural suspicions have been overcome, they make good and loyal friends and they will do almost anything for you."

Over on our right we could just barely make out a large, flat-topped mountain rising above the cactus forests at its base.

Thinking to change the subject, I asked our friend the name of this landmark, and he replied that it was called, locally, "La Sierra de los Muertos" (The Mountain of the Dead).

"Here," he said, "was fought the first great battle of the Spaniards and the Yaquis. It was a battle to the finish, and the superior weapons of the invaders finally prevailed. Only a few straggling warriors returned to tell the tale. Had the Spaniards been content with this victory, all would have been well, but attempts to invade the mountain strongholds of these people was a different matter. Here the Yaquis had all the advantages.

"For years, repeated attempts were made to get at the fabulous treasure that is supposed to be in the Bacatete Mountains, but none were ever successful.

"No, I guess there is not much doubt about the Yaquis having a great deal of gold," said our friend in answer to my question. "I have a doctor acquaintance who was traveling this very road only a few years ago, on a dark night such as this. He had treated some of the Yaquis and had no fear of them. Suddenly both front tires went flat. Coming to a bumping stop, he got out to see what the trouble was. He found that the road was crossed by a row of hard-wood stakes, buried, points up, in the dust.

"Looking up, he faced the muzzles of three thirty-thirty rifles in the hands of Yaquis. In the shadows were others mounted on their horses, silently watching the proceedings. The doctor realized that there was little he could do about such a situation, so when they ordered him to take his kit and mount a horse that was standing by, he obeyed. No explanations were asked or offered as they rode silently away through the giant cacti."

We rounded a bumpy curve in the road, and there were some lights ahead of us.

"That's a settlement around a fort," said our companion.

We could see now that the lights were from windows in bullet-scarred adobe huts. There were dying cookfires in some of the back yards.

In front of the fort a sentry stepped out and compared our license number with a slip of paper. Evidently the first fort had phoned our description ahead.

"How is the road north?" I asked, knowing by now what the answer would be.

"Muy fino," lied the sentry, and followed our passing with an "Adios" that was echoed by several of his fellows who were lounging and smoking in front of the fort.

We passed the small cultivated area and were soon enveloped in the ever-present thorn forest again.

"Say, how about that Yaqui Gold Story?" I asked, really interested at last in this unusual yarn.

"Oh, yes," he replied. "The doctor was led through the night

for many miles, until finally the Bacatete Mountains loomed ahead. As they entered the first gloomy canyon, light was breaking in the east. Here he was dismounted, fed, and blindfolded. Late that afternoon, after what seemed to be endless mountain trails, they arrived at the home of the chief of the wild mountain Yaquis.

"Here, he was relieved of the blindfold and ushered at once into a room where lay a sick girl, the daughter of the chief. Her father was standing over her when he entered and looking up said, 'Ah, you have come at last! We have tried all the cures known to the medicine men and, hearing from some of the braves of your ability, I sent for you. You will be rewarded according to what you accomplish. If the girl lives, you shall have all the gold you can carry—but if she dies, you shall die also.'

"Fortunately the girl's malady was one that the doctor was able to relieve, and in a few days she was up and about again. Convinced that the doctor had saved his daughter's life, the chief ordered him blindfolded again. This time he was led along a winding foot trail and down several flights of stairs. The damp, cool atmosphere proclaimed the fact that they were in a cave. His blindfold was finally removed and, there in the flickering light of the torches, he saw a wonderful sight. Stacks of small gold bars were arranged along the wall, literally tons of them. Besides these, there were piles of golden ornaments. Some were recognizable as loot from cathedrals, while other massive pieces must have belonged in Aztec temples, long overgrown by jungles.

"The chief explained that, although the Yaquis have considerable gold in their hills and stream beds, by far the greater part of the treasure had been accumulated by the forefathers of this warlike tribe in raids all over Mexico. 'Someday with this great wealth we hope to buy back the land and independence of the Yaqui people!' he added.

"The doctor was allowed to take what gold bars he could carry in his case, and, after more blindfolded wanderings, was finally released with his precious burden. They told him where he could find his car with the tires repaired."

Time had almost stood still for us as we bumped along the dark dusty trail that was the road to Guaymas. We could not have

averaged more than twelve miles an hour, but even this speed will get you someplace if it is continued long enough. Finally we could see another fort ahead, this time a newer one. A spot of moonlight had broken through the clouds and reflected on the whitewashed walls.

A sleepy sentry came forward and asked us if we had seen any Indians. Upon being assured that we had not, he appeared relieved and asked if we had a match. Remembering that I had a large box of American matches in the pocket of the car, and knowing how much they are prized by these people, I presented him with the entire box. His gratitude was profound. No one awake had a watch, but he judged it to be after twelve o'clock.

"Better, Señores y Señora, if you would stay here till morning," he said. "Accommodations could be found, and the road ahead is rough and dangerous."

We assured him that we were not afraid of the Yaquis and drove on. No, we weren't afraid of the Yaquis, but the shadows under the giant cactus did sometimes remind us of riders standing silently along the trail. The moon had gone under the clouds again, and the road had an even more foreboding appearance. Our friend had apparently talked himself out and was dozing. I was just seriously considering waking him so that it wouldn't be so quiet, when the night was shattered by a deafening roar.

I stopped the car in its tracks, expecting any moment to see the muzzles of Yaqui rifles come through the windows of the car. No, I wasn't afraid of the Indians—not much.

Finally my wife broke the silence. "You know, John," she said, "that sounded an awful lot like a blowout."

Usually when I get out of my car to find a tire very flat, it is by no means a happy occasion. Let me tell you that this flat tire was one of the pleasantest sights I have ever come upon.

The tire was soon changed and we rumbled down the road again. Our friend seemed to feel like another story, and I was glad to have something to keep me awake.

"You know," he commenced, "there is one story told about the Yaqui country that always sort of makes me laugh. A German widower and his two daughters moved into the foothills of the



Bacatete Mountains, and started a farm. They found a spot where they could divert a small stream and irrigate a parcel of rich land.

"Here they lived for some time and were bothered by no one. The Yaquis, passing by, seemed friendly enough and were glad for the presents of melons and garden truck that the settlers offered them. Finally some of the Indians brought small nuggets that they gave the German for the things they wished, and this was eventually their downfall.

"Seeing the gold, the German offered to purchase all they would bring him, but this proposition seemed to have no appeal to them. When they came by, one day, and found him reloading some thirty-thirty shells, however, the whole picture changed. They brought him their empties and he would reload them at a handsome price in gold.

"Finally came a day when, emboldened by his friendship with these people, he set out (against their oft-expressed warnings) to do a bit of prospecting of his own. The Yaquis saw him at his task, and when he reached home a deputation was awaiting him.

"'What is the matter?' he asked, looking from one to the other of the hostile faces about him. 'What are you here for?'

"'You shall soon see,' said the leader. 'You should have known better than betray the friendship of the Yaqui people.'

"They systematically went through all his possessions, taking everything of value. They drove his stock into a band and started them up the trail. Then they tied the old gentleman and cut off his left ear. When the pain had subsided sufficiently for him to look around he saw that his home was in flames and that they were carrying away his two buxom daughters, kicking and screaming, tied to the back of a mule.

"Crazed with fear and pain, the German finally reached one of the Mexican forts. Here he told his pitiful story, but found little sympathy. The Yaquis had been behaving peaceably for a long time now, and an expedition after stolen daughters would only bring on another war. They reminded him that he knew the chances he took when he went into the country.

"Brokenhearted, the old man returned to Mexico City and devoted all his energies to organizing a party to rescue his daughters.

After several years he was able to get a detachment of soldiers to see if his daughters were still alive. He found the girls easily enough, and they were both good, healthy mothers. They were glad to see their father and all that, but when he asked them to come with him, they placidly refused. They had been forced to marry Yaqui husbands, and apparently had learned to like it.

"Returning to Mexico City, their father took up steady drinking as a profession. About a year ago I saw him in one of the better bars frequented by American tourists. His one missing ear has become a sort of landmark to the drinking gentry, who are apparently ready to buy him another drink and listen patiently while he tells them, for the thousandth time, how he will get them all the gold in the Yaqui stronghold, if only they will finance an expedition to rescue his poor lost daughters."

The sky was clearing now, and over to our left we could see the reflection of the moon in the gulf. We rounded a curve, and ahead were the lights of Empalme. With a sigh of relief we recognized other lights farther on as Guaymas.

The road became better, and it was not long before we were knocking for admittance at the huge front entrance of the old "Gran Hotel Almada." Finally a sleepy servant arrived and opened the gates so we could drive the car into the patio.

"Señores," he exclaimed, "you did not come from the south in the night?"

"We certainly did," was our reply. The boy trudged off to find our rooms, mumbling something about the "loco Americano."

With the first storm over in the Sierras and water in the Sonora River deep enough to float the native ferries or "pongos," we entertained no fears for the morrow. The road north was in good shape and out of Yaqui territory.

We could only think how like a bad dream our trip through the night had been. It seemed so unreal here, as we sat munching a two A.M. lunch, and watching the pattern a low-hanging moon made on the rippling waters of Guaymas Bay.

## *Bird-Hunting with Bill*

**T**HIS story really began when Max Felker, Harlow Jones and myself went on a trip to the Superstition Mountains for the *Desert Magazine*. We stopped for lunch in the little town of Salome, Arizona, and after looking about at the collection of relics left by the late Dick Wick Hall, who made the place with his *Salome Sun*, we turned to the fine collection of tropical birds.

We had never heard of Bill Sheffler at the time, but just as Harlow was taking the color photo of a rare Philippine fish eagle, Bill and his partner, Ed Roth, came up and introduced themselves. The conversation, having started on the subject of birds, continued in the same vein.

Before long, I was enthusiastically telling Bill and Ed of our plans for another trip into Sonora, and all the fine birds that I had seen in that country. I described the huge Sonoran macaws and the little blue-rumped "parrotalettes," the giant blue-black and white jays with tails twice as long as their bodies, and the acrobatic koa birds that swung from spindly branches like trapeze artists.

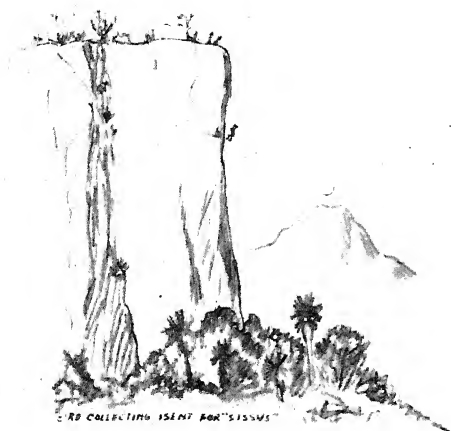
I noticed Bill smiling through all this, and when I finally stopped for breath, he informed me that the big macaw I had described was named after him. He had a keen interest in Sonoran bird life and a great urge to get down there and do some first-hand collecting. He went on to explain that the little blue-rumped bird I mentioned was the smallest of the parrot family living in North America, and the macaw one of the largest. The koa he also recognized from my description, and explained that it was actually a highly colored "sport model" member of the magpie family; even if it did have the colors of a tropical parrot.

The longer we talked, the more enthusiastic we all became until, finally, we decided to pool our parties and go together. It turned out to be a wonderful trip. Ed Ainsworth of the Los Angeles *Times* came along, as did a fellow journalist, Quay House.

We left in a blaze of glory, armed with letters of introduction and legal permits enough to settle an international dispute. Ed Ainsworth ran a story in the *Times* about our departure, and played up Bill's high hopes of collecting a series of a known but very elusive quail, known as the "Masked Bob White." He ended with a promise to keep his readers informed, from time to time, of the progress of his trip; and he did, even to such minute details as the price of pineapples and the success of the agrarian system. Getting across the border with our guns became complicated, in spite of all of our scientific permits. It was the day before a fiesta in Nogales, and one of the Generals who had to countersign a certain paper was, it seems, celebrating a bit early. He was finally tracked down, through the efforts of our ever-helpful friend Jimmy Mansen of the Pacific Brokerage Company. After proper introductions and the consumption of several pitchers of draught beer, the great man got around to asking what he could do for us. We explained, and he obliged with a flourish of his fountain pen, but he couldn't see why we were in a hurry. He insisted that we were going against the current, so to speak, in leaving, just as everyone who could afford to was coming to Nogales.

The first truly Mexican bird we encountered on our first day's ride was the carrion eagle. Perched on dead limbs or the tips of giant cacti, he soon became a common but interesting sight. This bird and the ever present buzzard form the "clean-up squad" of Mexico. I can hardly imagine what the country would do without them. Once in the afternoon we saw one of these eagles eating a dead snake, in the middle of the highway. He flew, at our approach, carrying the snake with him, and lit on the tip of a cactus. For an instant, he was the symbol of the Mexican flag, except for the kind of cactus.

Below Guaymas, we saw our first really tropical birds. They were a good deal farther north than Bill had expected to see them. The startling sight of a flock of green parrots, flying up from a





clump of fruiting cactus, thrilled us all. The cactus fruit was apparently the reason for the migration of these birds. There are instances in the history of Arizona when the Mexican parrots came as far north as the Papago reservation in the south of the state, to feed on the cactus fruit; due, perhaps, to a crop failure farther south. We talked of this and wondered what the border officials would do about such a migration, now, with the parrot law so strictly in effect. After all, they could hardly round up thousands of wild parrots and demand that they stay in quarantine the prescribed number of days before they could be allowed to enter. The disease of psittacosis, which was so heavily publicized a few years ago, has brought about laws which make it virtually impossible for a small dealer or scientific collector to enter the country with parrots. The large dealers still import great quantities of the birds, and are able to do so because the costs and permits are thus divided, and the cost per bird is not prohibitive.

Such a law seems a little strange in the face of the fact that there has never been a single case of psittacosis intercepted, in quarantining wild birds, before entry. There are eminent medical authorities today who question that the disease is anything more than one of the many forms of influenza, and believe that the disease is given to parrots by humans, rather than the other way round. It is a proven fact that these and other birds catch common colds from human beings, and these are often fatal in tropical birds. The law, however, will probably remain on the books for a long time, since it prohibits all competition of small dealers against those who lobbied for it.

A little farther south, Bill collected a hawk that interested him. A few natives appeared, on hearing his shot, and tried their best to tell Bill that this bird was not fit to eat. Bill tried to answer with his ten words of Spanish and a lot of arm-waving, and those of us who could speak a bit of Spanish just sat back and watched the fun. Bill hadn't the slightest idea what the natives were so wrought up about and they, of course, considered him a little "off in the head." Finally, Bill got in the car with a worried look, wondering if he had broken some local taboo, and the brush people sadly shook their heads at this ignorance. We kidded Bill the rest of the

afternoon; and when he started skinning his trophy, that night, we asked him how he intended to cook it, but he was too happy to mind. He had shot this fine hawk and caught two good woodpeckers, alive. The latter had caused a small riot of mirth and amazement in the neighborhood where they were taken. I would be willing to bet that some of the witnesses of the event will tell their great-grandchildren of the strange man who stopped his car, suddenly, at the edge of the village, jumped out with a small cloth sack tucked in his belt, and climbed the nearest tree like a scared cat; how he paused at the mouth of a woodpecker hole where a bird had been working a moment before, and started poking his fingers inside. I can just imagine how they will describe the way the bird tried to peck Bill's fingers and how Bill, with one swift motion, caught the bird's beak between his fingers and jerked him, flapping, out of his hole and into the collecting bag. He had caught the other woodpecker before the natives had caught their breath, and drove off in a cloud of dust, leaving them something to conjecture about for years to come.

The night we camped on the Cuchuhaqui arroyo outside of Alamos, Bill had the time of his life hunting night birds with a flashlight and a shotgun. He bagged several individuals of a species of rare "whippoorwill"; but one bird-call kept puzzling him. It came, loud and clear, from a dozen different directions at once, but when he approached one of the sources, the noise would cease. Finally, he had the whole camp out with flashlights, trying to locate this elusive "night bird." Eventually, we tracked one down and found that it was a small tree frog, about the size of the end of my finger, but it made a noise as loud as a hoot owl.

As we neared the ranch next day, Bill expressed again his eagerness to see the Sheffler Military Macaw in its type locality. I said nothing, for I knew the habit of these birds and the pleasant surprise that was in store for Bill. We got in at dusk, and were received with the typical McCarthy hospitality. It was like coming home to relatives. The McCarthys of Guirocoba were like that.

Everyone was tired, and we soon turned in for the sleep we all needed. We were still at it the next morning when a wild screeching split the air outside. Bill sat up in bed with a grin that spread



clear across his face. "I'll bet that's my macaw," he boomed as he rushed to the window. They were flying over in pairs, as they do every morning at that season; the early rays of the sun catching the burnished glint of a bright-colored feather, here and there, as they swung in formation toward the hills, where they fed. It was great to see the expression on Bill's face. He was a completely happy man.

Word of our arrival had gone round during the night, and we were no sooner out of doors than a crowd of small boys gathered to see what we were buying this time. Bill said to ask them to bring in eggs, and to trap birds. This was "right up the alley" of these little woodsmen. Breakfast was hardly over before they commenced arriving with their trophies. It was a parade.

The hardest thing was to establish the kind of bird that had laid the eggs. They were all sizes, colors and shapes. Bill knew his bird eggs, however, and spotted many of the better-known sorts, on sight. Now and then he would meet up with a puzzler, and I would have to interrogate the finder as to the color and size of the parents; what sort of nest they built, and other important facts, until finally, Bill would hit the combination and identify the bird that had laid the eggs. These sessions were very interesting to all concerned, and usually played to a considerable "gallery" of other small boys, and even to some grown men who had decided to get some of the easy money.

One day a boy, about fourteen, came in with a single large white egg, and Bill was completely "stumped." Hawk and falcon eggs were one of his specialties, but this one had him! It was certainly the egg of some member of that family, but the boy insisted that it was the egg of a bird called "waco." He further explained that this was the bird that flew down from the high cliffs calling "waco-waco," just before the first rains. When Bill offered him the usual price, the boy insisted that this was a much rarer egg, and that he had risked his life to get it. We questioned him further, and suddenly Bill's face brightened. He knew what the bird was. It couldn't be anything else but the "laughing falcon," one of the rarest birds in scientific collections, and one of the few named species of Mexico whose eggs had never been collected. "Tell the boy I'll give him ten pesos, each, for every egg like that he finds,"

he said; "that's the rarest egg I've ever had the pleasure of collecting, and a good deal more important find than the 'masked bob-white,' which we have been hunting."

The boy, who went by the name of Champion, told us that nests of this sort were very scarce, and always on the surface of some high cliff where it was next to impossible to climb. He also assured us that there was only one egg to the nest; if it could be called such, since the egg was simply laid in a hole in the vertical cliff without so much as a feather or stick between it and the solid rock.

The next day he came in smiling. He had found another "waco" nest, but it would take a rope to get at it. We asked him how much rope, and he judged about twenty meters. He claimed that he would not be afraid to go down the rope after the rare egg, if we would support him. Bill wanted the egg so badly he was willing to go to the additional expense of hiring a couple of good strong men to handle the rope and help, in general. We were soon on our way to the spot where Champion had discovered the hole in the rock, which he insisted was the nest of the waco birds. First, we looked up at the spot, and it made me dizzy to even think of letting a boy over that three-hundred-foot cliff, but Champion stood his ground and Bill wanted that other egg. There had been no more reported, in spite of what amounted to a fabulous offer.

We were all winded when we finally threw our equipment down on top of the hill and lay there, panting, in the dry grass. It was a tough climb, from the easiest point. When I looked over the edge of the cliff, from the top, I envied even less the job our small friend had picked for himself, but he seemed to be pretty calm about the matter. I did notice that his complexion wasn't as dark as when we started, but never by a single word or act did he betray any signs of faltering.

We left another boy at the bottom to "steer" us to the spot directly over the hole in the rock sixty feet below us. The helpers uncoiled the heavy new rope and fashioned a sort of chair with rope and poles. Champion stood by and watched, not saying much. Just then the male bird circled overhead. Bill reached for his shotgun, and the second time he circled, Bill dropped him neatly at our feet. It was one of the few specimens of laughing falcon ever to

be collected. It was a beautiful bird, mostly white and black. The crown of its head was snow-white, and large black rings around the eyes gave the expression of an owl. Even the Sonorans were curious to see the bird close up. Bill was just putting the trophy away in its wrappings when the mate swung over, even lower. Another shot missed, but the second dropped her, in full flight. We watched the other bird fall to the base of the cliff, and were glad that we had left a boy down there. There followed a few anxious moments while the boy hunted through the thick growth for the prize. Suddenly, he raised up with the bird in his hand. "Aqui esta," he cried; but his falsetto voice sounded a mile away.

During this brief delay the color had come back to Champion's face, but it began to drain away when they tied him into the contraption. As Bill gave him his final instructions about putting the egg between the layers of cotton in the cigar box and placing the box in the bag tied to his belt, Champion nodded, silently, instead of answering with his usual, "Si, Señor." He did not look down as he approached the cliff, but simply backed over the side, letting himself down with his hands. One heavy rope had already been dropped overside and anchored to a nearby tree, for this purpose, and the men paid out the other rope as Champion went down. His face was a greenish tinge, as I saw it disappear. A row of bright perspiration beaded his upper lip. He swallowed, hard, a couple of times, and waved one hand in an attempt at a jaunty salute, as he worked on down the rope. I wondered if he would find his voice when he reached the nest, but in a few seconds he called up, as naturally as ever. He had gotten over the first sick feeling, apparently, and sounded cheerful as could be. Then followed a wait that seemed like hours to me. I imagine it was an eternity to Bill. Then came the jerk on the free rope, which was the signal for the men to start taking up the slack. Champion was coming up!

He was "winded" when he got to the top, but not too far gone to stammer that there had been no egg in the nest. He looked the picture of dejection, as he sat and got his breath, and I guess the rest of us could hardly have posed for the spirit of gayety. It had been a tough climb and a trying time. But such are the fortunes of collecting.

Champion was fumbling in the bag at his side, and out came the

prettiest little bird, I think, I have ever seen. It was marked exactly like its parents, even to the huge rings around its eyes, except for the fact that the portions which were white in the adults were yellow in the baby, and the feathers were as downy as a baby chick's. Bill let out a yell of delight. Champion brightened. "Will you pay me, perhaps, for the little bird, instead of the egg which was already hatched?"

"I should say I will pay you!" shouted Bill. "Why, that's the only living member of its species in captivity. If I can raise it, I'll present it to the Bronx Zoo. It's too rare a bird to be kept in a collection like mine." Everyone was happy, especially Champion, when he was told that he would not only get a very fine bonus but that the baby bird would be shown in the largest city in America, to thousands of people a week, and that it would be given the name of Champion, in honor of its finder.

Unfortunately, little Champion never lived to leave Mexico. Bill knows a lot about raising small hawks, falcons and owls. He has had remarkable success, and if he ever gets another chance at a baby laughing falcon, I am sure he will raise it. It was some time after the little fellow died that Bill discovered the fact that this particular falcon eats very little, except small reptiles such as lizards and partly grown snakes. He had worked on the premise that the natural food would be small rodents and birds. Whatever vitamins were lacking without the reptile diet proved our undoing, and it was a sad group that watched Bill skin the precious little bird so that at least this much could be preserved for science. The color photos I took of little champion the day he was found are among my prize possessions; the only pictures of a baby laughing falcon in existence. Scientists who studied the skin marveled at the similarity between the baby and the adults. They claim that this close relationship of markings points to the fact that this is indeed a very old species of birds.

The rest of our party had time limits on their stay, so they returned to the States, leaving Bill and me at the ranch. We felt sorry for them; but, after all, they had seen and done a great deal in their short time. Ed Ainsworth had filed some wonderful stories to the *Times*. Ed Roth had made reels of color movie. Harlow

Jones had taken dozens of color photos, and Max Felker had had the time of his life. Quay House had accomplished the most, however. He had managed to fall in love with a very beautiful girl in Alamos. He left with that strange bemused expression on his face that we so often make fun of in lovers, but secretly envy.

Yes, Bill and I stayed on, and more birds came in every day. An old fellow, who made a living in the woods looking for wild honey, became quite a collector. He brought in a pair of gorgeous crested woodpeckers one evening, and I got my first sight of a pictorial woodpecker, one of the largest and most ostentatious of the whole clan.

Another time, Bill came in from the hunt with three squirrel cuckoos. These strange birds looked as if they were covered with beautiful rust-brown hair, instead of feathers.

As if to keep up the competition, the bee man came in the following day with two birds called the mot-mot. The male had a very strange lacy tail, and the old man insisted that, during the nesting season, the males decorate their tails by plucking out portions of the feathers to produce a lacy design, in an attempt to attract the females. Bill told me that this was an open question, and that some scientists hold that the feathers are naturally that way. I saw several more males that summer, and none of them had exactly the same pattern of openwork in their long tail feathers. Whether this proves anything or not, I do not know; but I lean toward the native's explanation. Maybe it's because it sounds more romantic.

Birds came in in such numbers that Bill was unable to go out to hunt, at all. He spent all of his waking hours on the porch, buying specimens and skinning them as fast as his deft fingers could do it. I tried my hand at it and soon found that I did not have the touch. Bill would sit in the light of the Coleman lantern on that porch, until one in the morning, trying vainly to get all the skins prepared before they spoiled in the hot weather. His eyes were red and tired and his fingers ached, but he kept on. This was the chance that any bird collector in the world would have been glad to have, and he was going to make the most of it for science. Finally he had to call a halt, for bright-red lines began to appear at the base of

his fingernails. Either the arsenic he was using was poisoning him, or he was getting an infection from the "semi-ripe" carcasses of some of the birds he had skinned. His fingers began to swell and he could not close his hands.

We packed as hastily as possible and started for the border, where he could get medical attention. We were loaded down with bird skins, eggs and crates of live birds. The latter had to be fed at regular hours. It was a nightmare of a trip for Bill, I am sure. His hands were paining him intensely.

One afternoon we came to a stop in a little village in the Yaqui country and went into the only café for a belated lunch. The proprietor greeted us with an effusive welcome. He knew the tastes of the "Americanos" and had just what we wanted. One of his Indian friends had brought a crate of live quail from the hills where he had trapped them. We could have broiled quail. It sounded wonderful, so we sat and sipped strong coffee while we waited patiently for the cook to kill and prepare the birds. They were well worth waiting for; juicy and sweet as a good quail should be, and entirely free from shot, since they had been trapped. As we pushed back our plates I asked the proprietor (more out of politeness than from curiosity) what kind of quail they were. His reply almost floored us. "They are from the mountain yonder," he stated, waving his hand in the general direction of a rugged range in the distance. "They are called by the Yaquis 'goriones banditos.'" This meant "bandit quail," which could indicate only one thing; we had just enjoyed a very fine meal of masked bobwhites. I asked him if there were any left, and he replied that these had been the last. I thought Bill was going to weep. We went out into the kitchen and there were the heads, each one with its little black mask.

There was no time to waste mooning over eaten quail. I had to get Bill to the border and medical attention, and the birds into the hands of someone who could care for them properly. The "masked bobwhite" are still on Bill's want list, and he is going back after them, sometime, just as I keep going back, time after time, to Sonora. Each discovery leads to something else. The country is like that.







## *My Indispensable Bootblack*

THE sketch of a boy shining my shoes is a portrait of one of the most useful friends I had in Alamos. I never knew his real name. Sometimes I wonder if he did. Everybody called him Pepi.

Pepi attached himself to me the first day I came to town, as small boys sometimes do, in Mexico; but he had a different sales talk.

"Señor, you need a boy to do your errands. Too many boys are not good. Some of them are not to be trusted; some are very bad. I am a good boy and can shine your shoes, run your errands, and be at your service, exclusively. You will save time, money, and much trouble if you but say the word; and I will personally see that your wants are cared for, and that the other boys do not bother you."

I asked what he would charge for such services. He was ready with his answer: ten centavos a day to keep the shoes shined, which would include wiping the dust off them, after I had walked to the plaza; so I would not be accosted by the other shoe-shine boys. There would be an additional flat rate of ten centavos for any errand, or small duty, to be performed during the day; and I need not pay him anything if there was nothing to do.

I could hardly turn down a deal like this, but wondered how he intended to keep the other boys from bothering. I gave him fifty centavos as a retainer fee, and had him unload my car and help me unpack. It took him all the rest of the day; but he was supremely happy.

That night, in the plaza, another shoe-shine boy approached. I was about to turn him down, when Pepi emerged from nowhere.

"The Señor has just had his shoes shined," he announced. "He is my customer, and we have a permanent understanding. If you do not like the arrangement, come into the alley, where the police will not see, and we will settle the matter."

The other boy declined, although he was considerably larger. The thing I liked about Pepi was his unobtrusiveness. He never made me conscious of the fact that he was following me; but wherever I went, in town, if I bought something that needed carrying, or got into any sort of difficulty, Pepi would seem to materialize from nowhere, and take over with complete efficiency. In a short while I would no sooner decide that I needed a cold drink brought from the cantina, and step to the door to look for Pepi, than there he would be, coming down the street.

"At your service, Señor," he would say, and mean it a hundred percent.

Whether it was to fetch a box of matches from the store, carry a note to a friend, mail a letter, or bring in a riding horse from a ranch two miles out of town, the fee was the same—ten centavos. One day he knocked at my door at an odd hour. I was working, and wondered why he was disturbing me.

"A telegram for the Señor," he exclaimed with pride. "All the way from California."

I asked him how in the world he had gotten it from the operator.

"The whole town knows, Señor, that I am your boy. I have had this arrangement with the telegraph office since the first day. This is the only one that has come."

I handed him the dime, and wondered, "What next?"

Each trip to Alamos was the same. He found out from my friends, the Dows, when I was coming; and there was Pepi, my welcoming committee. Once, Ed Ainsworth and a group of friends stopped at the Dows' over night. They all liked Pepi, and since they were friends of mine, he felt that his claim was valid. They were his fair territory. The fellows tipped him, to excess. I was afraid they would spoil him for good. The next day he came to Mrs. Dow with all the money—about three pesos.

"Will you take care of this money for me?" he asked.

She agreed, but wondered why he didn't take it home as he did his usual earnings.

"That would not do, Señora. My father would never believe that I earned this much, honestly, in one day, and he would likely whip me for stealing. If, on the other side, he was finally convinced that I had earned so much, he would demand the same every day; and this would be plainly impossible, Señora. Rich Americanos, on a fiesta, do not drop from the trees like ripe mangoes."

When Ed heard the rest of the story, he was charmed. Pepi made the major part of a column in the Los Angeles *Times*. Too bad he couldn't read English!

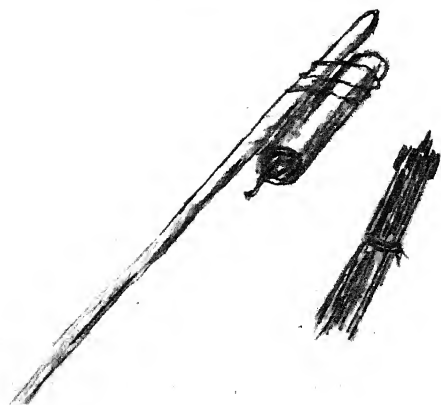
## *The Glorious Fourth of July*

**J**ULY FOURTH had never meant a great deal more than fire-crackers and Roman candles to me until the time we celebrated it in a little village where the people had never heard of such a holiday. As the fourth approached, I began to feel badly about my boy, Philip. He wouldn't have any fireworks. My little girl, Katherine, was too young to remember the holiday from the year before. My wife and I had a little talk and decided that we ought to celebrate the day in some manner, for the children's sake.

On the first, a young chap we had met in the Yaqui country rode in to the ranch. He was of American birth, but had been a soldier of fortune in several countries, including China, where he flew for the Chinese at the outbreak of the trouble with Japan. Jim Tuck was riding through the country on horseback, with the idea of writing a book. The folks at the ranch took him in with their usual hospitality. Tuck was an interesting chap, and a lot of fun to have around. When he heard of our plans for the Fourth, he offered to help. Margaret and Hoy (Mac's sisters) began planning something extra special for dinner, and Mac remembered some gunpowder he had stored in the saddle shed; which Tuck assured us would make a wonderful noise, if used properly.

At first we had planned just to do something a little different for the kids but, as we talked, one idea led to another until it finally became quite a thing. When the Fourth arrived, punctuated with Tuck's especially prepared gunpowder, the whole village knew that this was a gala fiesta of the "Norte Americanos." Shortly after breakfast, Tuck struck out with the shotgun and came back with two fine fat chachalacas. These birds are larger than a chicken,





and look and taste like something between a pheasant and a turkey. We dug among our American canned goods and came forth with such delicacies as canned sweet potatoes, string beans and Bartlett pears. We even found a large can of pie cherries, which Margaret confiscated and made into the first cherry pie Mac had tasted in twenty years. I think there were tears in his eyes when he came into the kitchen and smelled it baking.

We were all sitting out on the porch, except Tuck, and waiting for the dinner to cook, when there was a squeal and a blare, and American radio music filled the air. The radio had been pronounced dead by all of us; but Tuck had got to fiddling with its insides. He had miraculously found the right loose wire.

The dinner was a masterpiece; all three women had done their utmost, and we had to pinch ourselves from time to time to be sure that we weren't dreaming. Stuffed chachalaca, baked in a fireless cooker, was the main dish, surrounded by all the things we had been hoarding through the summer for some special occasion. When the dessert finally came it was worth the price of all the groceries we had brought from the States, to see Mac and his sisters enjoy those canned pears and the cherry pie.

While we ate and all through the afternoon we had music, interspersed with news and patriotic speeches that somehow didn't sound as "corny" as usual. A good many of the village folks came up in the afternoon and listened to the radio music. It was a treat to them too. When they asked us just what this fiesta was about, Tuck attempted to explain in Spanish. Jim is a "darned" good talker, even in a foreign language, and when he was through there were shouts of "Viva los Estados Unidos" and "Viva Libertad." I had a couple of gallons of mescal left over from pickling snakes; so I passed it around, and first thing we knew there was a dance going on right out in the yard.

Philip and Katherine could hardly wait until it was dark to fire the rockets we had bought in the village. These were the ordinary homemade affairs constructed from newspaper and string tied to a long twig, but they worked. Our neighbors had brought more of these to help us celebrate our fiesta; so the night was noisy for a while with the pop and swish of the little gunpowder rockets.

Someone from the village started playing the guitar, and the dancing started all over again. Tuck had a grand time trying to teach some of the village girls American dance steps, there, in the hard-packed yard.

Finally the dancers tired, and we turned on the radio again. It was another patriotic program. We sat and enjoyed every word and every song with a nostalgic enjoyment that only an American who has been away from his native land can understand. The program closed with a band playing the "Star Spangled Banner," and without any exchange of words, we Americans there on that front porch in Sonora, rose and sang our national anthem as loud and as well as we could. Our Mexican neighbors were impressed; they said they had known Mac for thirty years, and this was the first time they had ever heard him sing.

We explained that this was our national song, and they politely said it was a "muy bonita canción" (a very beautiful song). We agreed that we thought so too, and bade them all good night.







## *The Illiterate Bookseller*

**T**HIS drawing reminds me of one of the most amusing characters I have ever met, in any country; and certainly, one of the most astounding. I was up in a village in the mountains, far from the sights and sounds of civilization, when this chap walked up on the porch where I was working.

I knew he had something to sell, and that it must be something a little unusual; for he himself was unusual, to put it mildly. There was a wild gleam in his eyes that made me sniff the air to see if he might have been drinking, but he was sober. He doffed his hat in the politest manner and, after the usual banalities, launched into the "darnedest" sales talk I had ever heard.

"Señor, you are a man from the States, and realize the terrible conditions which prevail upon the earth. This man Hitler, and all of the other evil lords of warfare; they are driving our earth to ruin and suicide. Do you not agree?"

I nodded my head; there seemed little to say to such an obvious statement.

"Then Señor, if you agree, surely you will be interested in what is behind all of this and how it can be prevented."

All this time he had been holding a small satchel. Now he opened it with a flourish, drew forth a book—gaudy in color—with angels, and trumpets and lightning, on the outside.

"Here," he said, "are the answers to all these and many more questions which trouble the human race today. It is all here in this book, for only the sum of one peso. It says here—" and he began to quote page after page, as he turned them, without paying much attention.

Finally he stopped for breath, and I asked him where in the world he had gotten these books, and how he had become interested in selling them. He replied that it was an international movement that was sweeping the earth. I knew, from the little he had "read," that the doctrine was merely that of the Russellites that swept the Midwest when I was a child; but this was streamlined, given international status, and the glamor of a cheap lithograph job on the cover.

The salesman saw I was interested, so he started "reading" some more passages, but far too glibly and freely for a man of his appearance. Suddenly I noticed him turn two pages at once, but the "reading" continued without a break of any kind. He was spreading the doctrine of "Jehovah's Witnesses," and selling me a peso's worth of book (he hoped).

When he came up for air again, I decided the matter had gone far enough.

"You are a good Christian, I take it," I said.

"But si, Señor, of course. Otherwise, why should I trudge miles over the mountains, bearing the Lord's message?"

"If that is the case," I replied, "you would not think of lying to me, would you?"

"No, Señor, I could not bring myself to tell a lie."

"Then, my friend, I would like to ask you one direct question and I expect a truthful answer. Can you read?"

The man looked as if I had struck him over the head with a club. I was really sorry that I had brought up the subject. He stood there with his lip quivering and hands trembling; I was afraid he would burst into tears. Then came a torrent of explanations:

"It all came about this way, Señor. I have no desire in my heart to deceive anyone, but I ask: How am I to sell these books if people know that I cannot read? My passion is to sell the books. Some months ago I was in Navejoa, and a troupe of Jehovah's Witnesses got off the train with these so beautiful books and a phonograph which played records in Spanish—saying what was in the books. The people were from your country and could talk little Spanish; but the fine phonograph could talk very well. They set it up in the market place and sold books like palletas at a bull fight.

I listened every day to the records, and in a little while I could recite every word. This gave me an idea; so one day I showed the visitors how well I had learned what was on the record. They said that was wonderful, and sent me out with a lot of the books to sell. Soon I was back with the money, wanting more books; and that, Señor, is how I go into the bookselling business. I like it so very much. Please, Señor, do not tell the people of the village that I cannot read. The word would travel ahead of me by the 'brush telegraph,' and I would be laughed out of Sonora. After all, most of the people who buy the books cannot read, either, but I am always considerate enough to pretend that they can."

I bought a book and promised to keep his secret, knowing that such a "movement" could cause little harm in a hill country like Sonora where folks are individuals and tend to do their own thinking. Anyway, just as the salesman said, most of the purchasers can't read and the pictures were "awfully" pretty (and I do mean awfully).

## *Mystery of the Mexican Miser*

I AWOKE very early one morning to a pleasant tinkling sound. It was as if a tiny bell were ringing several times a minute. Light was just creeping into my upstairs room, bringing out the detail of the hand-hewn cypress beams and massive adobe walls. At first I thought it might be a remnant of some half dream, lingering in my mind, but as I sat up in bed and rubbed the sleep out of my eyes, the sound continued. It was not the sound of a bell. I could tell, now, that I was wide awake. It sounded more like the clink of a large coin. There would be a pause of several seconds and then it came again. Unfortunately, I have always been a very curious person, so I started looking around.

I stepped to the front balcony and looked out. Girls were filling ollas at the fountain in the plaza. It was still early, or the water would have stopped running. A streak of sunlight was just touching the top of the poinciana tree, in front of the hotel across the plaza—turning it into a living mass of flame. I stood still and listened. The noise continued, but it sounded as if it was coming from the rear of the house.

Going to the back of my room, I discovered that the sound was a bit louder. I was making progress. This one large room was the only second-story part of the house. A long French window opened out onto the roof. Still glad in my pajamas, I crept out to see if I could solve the mystery. The sound was even louder, outside, and seemed to be coming from the patio of the single-story house next door. The roofs joined and, without considering the foolishness of the act, I crept across to a point where I could see into my neighbor's patio. I was new in the town, and hadn't the slightest idea

what sort of people they might be or how they would take to such an intrusion, but curiosity spurred me on.

I was still unable to see what was going on from this point, but I could tell by the sound that I had located the source. In fact, the sound was so clear now that there was absolutely no doubt that it was made by dropping coins. The town was full of buried-treasure stories. I began to wonder if I had stumbled upon someone who had discovered such a treasure and was busily counting it. If this were the case, I had better beat a hasty retreat, because this is about the only thing I have ever found Sonorans to hold secret. I had no desire to get into trouble.

I started to turn back but, somehow, curiosity overcame my better judgment. I simply had to find out who was counting all this money, for the tinkling had been going on for some time. I walked as silently as I possibly could over the flat tiled roof to a point opposite the sound of the falling coins. Then I got down and crawled to the edge of the roof and, after taking a big deep breath, stuck my head over the edge to look.

There sat an old bald-headed man with little tufts of white hair over his sideburns. I couldn't see his face, for I was looking straight down. What I did see was the gaping muzzle of a thirty-thirty rifle. It was leaning, handily, against a chair beside the man. A dirt-covered sack lay on a small table before him, and a pile of corroded silver pesos. On the other side, the man had a bowl full of what must have been a cleaning solution. In this bowl were several more handfuls of coins.

He would pick one of the pesos out of the bowl and rinse it in a pail of water, beside him, on a bench. Then he would rub it briskly and drop it into a box where it clinked, as it struck a growing pile of pesos, shining as clean as the day they were minted. I watched, fascinated. I had never seen so many coins at one time outside of a bank. Here, indeed, was the romantic mystery that I had expected to find in Mexico.

It must have been several minutes before I realized again the precarious situation in which I had placed myself. The thirty-thirty looked like business and I had no doubt that the old fellow would have been ready and willing to use it, had he seen me peeking over

his roof like a common thief. I realized, with a sick feeling, that he could kill me and be well within his rights as a Mexican citizen. What difference that could possibly have made to me, after I was shot, didn't seem to occur to me at the time.

Inch by inch, I pulled myself back from the eaves of the miser's roof and, finally, made the window of my bedroom. Once inside, I felt faint from the reaction and sat down on the bed to think of what a fool I had been. The mystery still intrigued me, but I definitely had resolved not to try creeping up on an armed man, counting that much money, again.

That morning at breakfast I inquired, innocently, if any of my host's family had heard strange sounds early in the morning. The answers were a hundred percent negative. Then I realized that they all slept downstairs and such a sound would hardly carry directly through the two-foot adobe walls that separated the two houses. I walked by the open gate to my neighbor's patio several times that day, but without any luck. I hated to tip my hand by any other inquiries. One thing I did notice as I passed was the lovely rose garden inside. Once, in the late afternoon, I saw my neighbor, stooped over one of the rose bushes, but his back was turned and I couldn't just stand there in the street and stare until he turned around.

The next morning I was again awakened by the sound of tinkling silver. The thing was beginning to get under my skin. The more I thought of it, the more I was convinced that I had better make no inquiries at all. They might arouse suspicion and, so far, it seemed I was the only person who shared even part of his secret. The next day was the same, except I came home in the forenoon from a short walk just in time to see the back of my neighbor, who was boarding the bus to the next town. He was carrying a small suitcase, and it was obviously heavy. I remembered, then, that there was a bank in the next town, and none in ours, so I put two and two together. The plot was thickening. He was cleaning those coins so he could deposit them in the bank without their arousing suspicion.

Several more days went by without my getting any farther with the mystery. Every morning, I was awakened by the sweet sound







of clinking silver. The man certainly must have gone through that sack of coins and started on another, by that time. I was in one of those situations where only characters in books seem to have enough ingenuity to solve the problem. Things had reached the point where I could think of little else but the mystery of the Mexican miser.

Finally I decided a change of scene would do me good, so, the next morning at breakfast, I announced that I was going to the next town, for the day, and I asked if any of the family would like to go. My host said he thought not, but that our next door neighbor would probably like to ride along. He explained that this gentleman made frequent trips there, and would probably welcome the change from a crowded bus. One of the youngsters went to inform him, and returned with the word that he would be delighted to go with me, and would be ready in fifteen minutes.

I rushed upstairs to get ready, trembling with excitement. At last, things were coming my way. I was bound at least to find out something of the man's background. When I came down, he was sitting in the "sala," waiting, and my host introduced us. He was very friendly, and glad to get a ride. Beside him on the floor was the little black suitcase. I was really getting somewhere. It was beginning to work out just as it does in the books. I hoped there would not be a murder connected with it, but I was not averse to a beautiful heroine, somewhere in the picture.

When we started out to the car, I offered to carry the suitcase for the old gentleman and, to my surprise, he allowed me to.

"It is very heavy," he said, "and you are much younger and stronger than I."

When I set it down in my car, I did so rather roughly, and, to my delight, there was the unmistakable tinkle of coins. I tried to look innocent as we shut the doors and drove off, but I could see that the old man was smiling.

"Señor," he said, "I suppose it would be best for us both if I explain why I am carrying this suitcase full of silver pesos to the bank, every few days."

The story-book quality of the thing faded, right there before my eyes. He explained that he had been foresighted enough to sell

his large ranch, just before the Agrarian movement expropriated such properties. He had moved to his town house and, since times were pretty uncertain, he had changed all the money into silver pesos and buried them where they would be safe. Revolutions had caught him, before, and he had found that bank credits were sometimes worthless and even paper money lost its value, but he knew that silver would always have purchasing power.

Now, times had settled down. There were no more talks of revolutions and uprisings. It was silly to leave the money buried in the ground, like a miser. He was redepositing it in the nearest bank. It was quite a job, too. The coins had all corroded while underground, and he wouldn't think of bringing them into the bank in such a dirty condition.

I smiled at myself and my "romantic mystery," as we rode out of town. We talked of many things, even his hobby of raising roses. I found him very congenial and full of wonderful information about the country. I could see that we were going to get along well, as neighbors. Suddenly I realized that I had lost a mystery and found a friend. It was a fair exchange. I never told him about the episode on the roof.

## *A Sonora Ghost Town*

**T**HERE is something symbolic about the little locomotive with no place to go—sitting on the outskirts of La Colorada. It is symbolic of the country, of the people, and of boom mining towns in general. A more methodical community would have run the train over the track to some point where it could be salvaged, before they took up the rails; but things are not done this way in mining towns, as many of the ghost cities of our Western deserts still testify. Personally, I am glad they didn't think to move the train first. It makes a good landmark, although it did give me quite a shock the first time I saw it.

We were lost, when we stumbled into La Colorada—lost and tired, and disgusted with ourselves and the people who had tried to direct us on a “sure-fire short cut to Hermosillo.” Actually, it was largely our own fault that we had missed the trail, for we had left in plenty of time to have made the whole trip in daylight, had we kept going. Our path, however, took us through an entirely different type of desert, behind the famous Bacatete Mountains where the wild Yaquis live. Howard and I both have collecting urges, and every few miles one or the other saw something that simply had to be caught and preserved, or a plant that must be collected and photographed. We had a wonderful time, and paid little attention to the lowering sun till it suddenly disappeared behind the rugged towers and battlements of the Bacatetes. Our friend told us that we couldn't miss the road—that all we had to do was to follow the main traveled trail, and everything would work out fine. So far, they had been right; there had been nothing but the very faintest side roads leading off, and the route led over fairly smooth land

where a road can be pretty good without much, if any, attention.

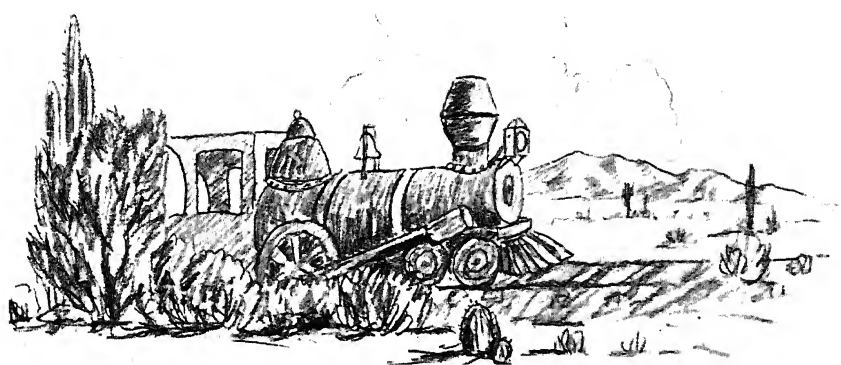
We kept forging ahead through the gathering gloom, and wondering whether we would be able to get a room, so late, in Hermosillo: for we were actually only about halfway there, due to our dallying.

Finally the trail led out onto a flat grass-covered plateau, that ran for seemingly interminable miles. We could see a little light in the distance, but it was a long time before we came close enough to discover that it was coming from a house. When we came to a stop in front of it, we saw that it was a whole settlement of adobe houses. This one, which was a combination store and restaurant, was the only one boasting a light in the window. We went inside and were gratified to find that they would serve us a hot meal—such as they had. They assured us we were on the “main highway” to Hermosillo, and that we would have no trouble in finding our way, especially if we would wait there for an hour or so until the moon came up.

It took the “hour or so” for the lady to prepare our meal, but the night stretched before us now, and we were in no particular rush. It was a cattle community, and dozens of cowboys were standing or sitting around in the street, while their horses waited patiently at hitching posts or scrubby trees. Someone started singing, a few doors down, and in a short time there was a crowd, and the singing became louder.

We felt better when we left the little shop, after the hot food and coffee. Our misgivings of the early evening had made way for complete confidence and a sort of anticipation of a trip through this stretch of wild country at night. The moon was up now, and the singers had gathered on the banks of a large pool, about a hundred feet wide. Most of them were dressed in white, and the moonlight on their clothing, contrasted with the shimmering water, made a picture worth remembering.

We continued on the same road, and it began to look as though everyone was right about its being impossible to get off it. Just about the time we were ready to congratulate ourselves on this good luck, we came to a fork in the road. We got out and looked







at the tracks revealed by our headlights. All four agreed that the most travel was on the right road. The trails didn't fork at a wide angle. In fact, we thought they would probably come together again, farther along.

No road of this sort is straight; so at first, we thought little of it when we came to twists and bends. There was one disturbing thing that finally became evident, however. The moon had been shining in the left side of the car when we left the cattle camp, but now we were heading right into it. We were heading north (we hoped), and this trail kept bearing to the east.

At last we came to another branch in the road. The most travel went straight ahead, but the trail to the left looked as if it would take us back to the one we should have taken. We turned left, and the road got no better fast. Soon we were climbing gently and could see a jagged range of hills ahead. A canyon opened up before us, and the road led around winding curves that had been graded by an engineer who knew his business. This was no ordinary hit-or-miss desert trail. We began to feel better about the whole thing, for we were headed in the right direction again, and the road was obviously going somewhere, even though we could see no signs of recent travel.

The moon went behind a bank of clouds before we emerged from the canyon, but we could see the glimmer of another light ahead, and we felt the relief that can be appreciated only by those who have lost their way in a strange and wild country. We were surprised to see a soldier standing in front of the open door in the lighted building. Several others were sitting round a table, inside, playing cards. Here at last was someone who could tell us the distance and the way to Hermosillo. The sentry stepped forward when we stopped. He was polite enough, but insisted that it would be impossible for him or anyone else to direct us, in the dark, to Hermosillo. He said that from here on the roads were very bad, and changed with each rain. A couple of his companions came to the door and substantiated his statements, so we decided the best thing to do was to camp and try to get a little sleep out of what was left of the night. We did find out that the town was called La Colorado, and there was a woman here who would serve us breakfast.

We hated to unpack all our cooking equipment, so this was at least an encouraging note.

The town was a great deal larger than we had supposed. We could see by our headlights that some of the buildings had cost a great deal. This bothered us a little, because we did not remember hearing about anything like this little town, in the vicinity of Hermosillo. After winding through several more narrow streets, we emerged on the edge of town and made camp in a level spot. It was good to lie down and relax, after the anxiety of the night. My arms ached from holding the car over the bumpy road, and a burning sensation between my shoulder blades told me that I had driven enough for one stretch.

It was the howling of coyotes that awakened me. I raised up in my sleeping bag, and looking around, I got one of the shocks of my life. The moon had come out from behind the clouds, and things were almost as bright as day. There, not two hundred feet away, was a locomotive (or the ghost of one). It looked like something out of a museum, or a railroad "ad" on "fifty years of progress." I shook my head and rubbed my eyes to be sure that this was not part of a weird dream. The little engine was still there, headed right in my direction. I looked around for the tracks, but none could be seen. This had me baffled.

Silently I crawled out of my sleeping bag and walked over to the apparition. I actually felt its rusty cowcatcher before I could believe fully in its reality. Then I saw, at my feet, the ends of the rails. The rest had been taken away. I realized that the level spot we had picked for our camp was in reality an old railroad bed. I crawled rather sheepishly back into my sleeping bag, and was glad that the rest of the party had not awakened to see me parading around in my shorts, at three in the morning, inspecting a decrepit piece of rolling stock.

The next morning I was quite nonchalant when my companions peered out of their sleeping bags at the little train. I didn't tell them I had already made a complete inspection.

The woman who served meals was very old and very talkative. She had some ripe papayas on her trees in the patio, and we each had a half of one of these delicious fruits with a little lime juice, for

a starter. It was a fine breakfast. The old woman, who had been a young girl in the inn when La Colorada was at its height, was more than willing to entertain us with yarns of "the good old days." By far the best of them was the story of the empty graveyard:

"You must, by all means, see this so interesting spot before you leave," she insisted. "It was built at great expense by some of your countrymen who operated the mine. This was a great gold mine in its time, and the vein was so rich and wide that it looked as if it would last for many lifetimes. These men felt that when they died they would like to be buried in something a little better than the 'Campo Santo' where the common miners were put to rest; so they organized what you Americans call a 'club.' The town was large, then, and they rented a big room where they came at night and played for money a game they called poker. The object of this game, it seems, was to wager that you had higher cards than your fellows, even if you had not. The Americans played this game, and gambled on it as recklessly as the Mexican miners bet on a cock fight, but, being well paid engineers and foremen, they had a great deal more to spend. From each winning, the player was bound to put a percentage into a fund for a burial ground, to be used by the members when death came to any of the lot.

"This game that they played must have been for high stakes, for soon the club bought a good piece of ground on a hillside, and had a large stone fence and a fine iron gate built to close it in. We Mexicans thought this very strange. With us, it is something solemn to prepare for death; but to these peculiar men, it all seemed to be a very big joke, to be laughed at and talked about in the lightest manner. On Sunday mornings, it was not uncommon to see most of those who were sober enough to walk gathered in their empty burial grounds, admiring the flowers and looking at how the trees grew. They had hired a fine gardener and had planted trees and flowers that were the envy of the neighborhood. Sometimes, they would even carry some member of their club, too borracho to travel on his own feet, and show him the spot where they would bury him if he drank too much. This never seemed to change the drinking habits of those who were carried on the trips of inspection. The

Mexican people of La Colorada believed that they must all be loco in the head.

"The trees grew, and so did the burial fund. Rumors around town had it that each member had as much as five hundred pesos to be spent on his funeral. We all looked forward to the first death. A funeral such as this would be a real event.

"Then, one day, the vein of rich gold ore pinched out as suddenly as it had opened up. In a few months the ore that had been uncovered in the various parts of the mine was all put through the mill. The tunnels and shafts that they dug to find more ore were all unsuccessful. We felt that this was the ill luck that everyone had predicted, to follow such a hilarious attitude toward so serious a thing as death; and people began moving away.

"Those who moved away first were the unlucky ones; for the 'club' called a meeting to decide on the spending of the money they had saved for funerals, and voted to spend the whole sum on a great fiesta as a sort of farewell to the town, before they left. There were wagonloads of beer taken from the little train, and all of the other things that it takes to make a grand fiesta. Word went out on the brush telegraph, and the whole town was full—to help these strange men celebrate what they called the 'funeral of La Colorada.' It was a great time, and it took over a week to spend all the money. No one was seriously hurt in any of the fights. The Americans at last moved away without burying any of their party in the so beautiful Campo Santo. Now, there are only a handful of us left in the town—mostly hunting pieces of ore, overlooked by the miners in the rush days, and grinding it out with arrastras and burro power.

"La Colorada is 'muy triste,' my friends, and the sadness does not all come from the fact that the great gold mine is closed. The place is being haunted by more and more ghosts, every year. On Saturday nights, people who are unlucky enough to pass the room where they played their games can hear the clink of money and glasses. No one goes near the graveyard at night, for it is said that the spirits of club members who have died return, each night, to the place where they had hoped to be buried. They are a so very strange lot of men! Crazy and unpredictable, even in death."

## *Parade of the Planters*

THE season of corn planting is a special time in the village of Guirocoba, as it is in most Sonoran hill communities. Corn is the basic crop. Without it there would be no tortillas; and without tortillas, the average Sonoran would be unhappy and probably unhealthy—yet surrounded by the finest foods in the world.

Eating habits are among the hardest to change of all human fixations. The great plant explorer David Fairchild remarks in several of his works on the difficulty of adding new plant products to the diet of people. He found it just as hard to do among the so-called civilized races as it was among cannibalistic islanders. Many wonderful food plants have been brought into our own country at tremendous cost in human energy, and sometimes loss of human life, only to be treated as a passing novelty, and finally discarded.

I am saying these things so the reader will not unduly criticize the people of Sonora as he reads this chapter. Eating is one of the things in which even the most civilized people still retain prejudices that amount to animal instincts. Actually an instinct is little more than a deep-seated inherited prejudice which is difficult to deal with by the standard processes of reasoning.

It is with an instinctive joy that the people of Sonora welcome the first rain. To these people the raising of corn is as natural as is the eating. For centuries, the one was impossible without the other, and today it is a struggle for the average Sonoran to separate the two.

The rains come on or about San Juan's Day (June 24). If they do not come by then, a lot of folks quit burning candles in front

of San Juan, or turn his face to the wall. Hill people have a deep sense of justice that extends even to their treatment of favorite saints. Their methods seem to get pretty good results. San Juan very seldom forgets to make it rain on his day. There is usually a fiesta in the forenoon; but everyone stays pretty close to shelter in the afternoon, in order to get out of the rain.

Although the climate is quite mild in this latitude, spring does not really come until the rainy season starts. The whole mass of thorn forest, covering ninety percent of the hills, is leafless, not on account of cold weather but because of this regular seasonal drought. The country starts drying up in October, and through the winter gradually gets to a point where it is actually a desert. The only flowers and green things are along the arroyos and around springs where water persists. That is why a person can walk from deserts to tropics in a few minutes by simply descending into a watered canyon.

When the rain does arrive, it is usually accompanied by splendid electric displays and comes down in such solid sheets that the whole surface of the ground, even on a side hill, is covered with water. What had been a dry dusty land suddenly becomes a bog. Arroyos once sandy become turbulent streams, and waterfalls cascade down from every rocky ledge. It is no wonder that these people dramatize the coming of the first rains. Nature does a rather spectacular job of it, too.

On the morning after, the first light in the east starts a great bustle in the village. By sunrise there is an almost complete exodus. Every trail out of the village bears a colorful parade of planters, singing and laughing as they go, and swinging their tools of toil like banners in a pageant. It is a wonderful sight. Men, women and children, all that are able to walk to the fields, are out to turn the first black earth. The fact that the ground would be in much better condition a little later has nothing to do with the matter. The rains have arrived, and the urge to dig in the ground and to plant corn is upon them; just as the urge to build a nest comes even to a caged bird that never saw another of its own species.

The first day's work in the fields is not particularly important, except as a start. It is principally an emotional thing, expressing the







pent longing for the rain and the sight of growing corn and the feel of damp fecund earth, once again, between bare toes.

If we "civilized folks" are inclined to smile indulgently at this sort of thing, we might consider the sudden increase in trade at seed counters in such large cities as New York, about the time the first robin appears in Central Park. A man in the seed business once confided to me his well founded opinion that over half of the seeds purchased retail, in bright colored packages in the spring, are bought by people who haven't a square foot of ground in which to plant them. It is a well established fact that garden magazines and seed catalogues are published for thousands of city people, who find in them a partial release for this pent-up emotion—this deep-seated instinct to make something grow from the soil.

Methods of planting in Sonora vary, according to the terrain and the amount of "agricultural education" that has reached the particular area. At Guirocoba, equipment ranges from a team of mules and a factory-made plow through all variations of home-made implements drawn by anything from a donkey to man power.

On the steeper hillsides many dubious looking fields produce good crops of corn that have been planted with the ancient planting stick of the aborigines, and weeded by hand. This is by far the most interesting method. The land has been cleared by cutting and burning, during the dry season, and allowed to stand without further grooming until the first rains come to soak the soil. Then the family marches out and starts to work. Father walks along and pushes the stick into the wet soil at regular intervals. A boy or girl follows with a hat full of seed corn, and drops a few kernels, carefully, into each hill. The rest of the family trail behind, firming the soil down over the seed with their bare feet. Stones and stumps are not cleared from these fields, so the rows are rather uneven, but, since all cultivation is by hand, this matters little, if at all.

The results are what count, in any farming. The amount of grain per acre per man-hour expended is important. If these things are to be taken as the basis for judgment, the planting stick is still the most efficient tool in the hill country. It takes considerably less time to plant such a field. The corn matures earlier and usually bears a better crop, in spite of the fact that the side hills are normally

composed of poorer soils than bottom lands; which can be plowed. I noticed, too, that weeds did not come up so thick or so soon as in plowed fields. The burning kills most of the weed seed, and what is scattered by birds or ants does not get buried in the soil, to compete with the corn. The roasting ears harvested from the "milpas"—as these side-hill fields are called—are quite free of worms; while corn in the plowed fields of the "luckier landholders" is about as wormy as corn in our country.

I said at the outset of this book that I was not going to try to solve Mexican problems, socially, economically or politically. I am sure the Mexicans are more capable of solving their own problems than any outsider. I will, however, make the prediction that someday the bright young men and women being turned out by the agricultural schools of the country will raise their eyes from the intensely cultivated fields to some recalcitrant brush farmer who insists on planting his milpa in the old-fashioned way; and they will learn something very important.

In such a hilly country as Mexico, bottom land is at a premium. I believe with these agricultural experts that this land should be eventually used for more efficient and varied crops. This should not put an end to the use of the side-hill milpas for corn, simply because they cannot be worked by community-owned tractors. Today milpas are being abandoned, and corn is getting more scarce every year. More attention to scientific seed selection, and less teaching on the importance of the modern plow, might solve a good many problems; I firmly believe it would work that way.

Going back to the use of the planting stick is to follow original instinct, which is more firmly imbedded in the minds of these hill people than in populations such as ours, which have been subject to change with each generation. A creature, be it bird, beast, or human, that is forced to abandon instincts is a frustrated individual. Such frustration is the price we pay for our civilization. It keeps our psychoanalysts and doctors at work overtime, and fills our mental institutions with persons who could have been useful and happy.

Instincts cannot be changed in a day. Darwin, in *The Voyage of the Beagle*, draws a very interesting comparison between birds on the British Isles and in the Galapagos Archipelago. In England,

instinctive fear of man often brings death, by fright, to newly hatched young who see or smell man for the first time. The birds Darwin studied in the Galapagos Islands, having had contacts with man for only seventy-five or a hundred years, had no instinctive fears. They perched on the shoulders of sailors, who killed them with sticks, for the devil of it. After all these years since Darwin, these birds today are still foolishly tame regarding man.

Since man can reason, instincts can be submerged by intellect in a few generations; but I believe with many sober thinkers that submerged instincts sometimes backfire. It is my sincere hope that the "social revolution" now growing in Mexico will take into account the importance of this fact, and that basic changes will not be attempted too suddenly. Mexico in its unchanged portions is a much pleasanter and healthier land than in its "reformed and educated" areas.

Without realizing why, the average American visiting rural Mexico feels rested and relieved. He may rant about the primitive conditions, and swear he could do any of the common chores of the Mexican farmer in an easier and more efficient manner, but deep in his heart he secretly envies these people for their peace and contentment. This peace and contentment is largely due, not to ignorance and indolence, as many claim, but to the fact that these people are still largely free to follow their natural feelings.

## *The Love-life of the Jumping Bean*

ONE of my first walks around the streets of Alamos led me into a very interesting field of research. I noticed a sign over a doorway reading "Compra Brincadores." I have seen signs in many parts of the world, offering Jumping Beans for sale, but this was the first time I had come across a firm that bought them. It sounded like an interesting business, so I walked in and got acquainted.

The proprietor of the firm smiled a pleasant greeting, as he rose from his modern desk and assured me that he did buy "brincadores," as he called them.

"In fact," he explained, "I am really the sole buyer of jumping beans, in quantity, in Mexico. They are all produced within burro-driving distance of Alamos, and I buy and resell the entire annual crop."

About then, a storekeeper from an outlying village came in with a sugar sack, in which he had about a peck of jumping beans. They were quiet when he first set them down on the floor and started his bargaining, but as the "negocios" proceeded, the beans began to jump merrily in the sack, making a soft noise like gently falling rain. The perforated-tin shipping cans, which sat on all sides of the office, also gave forth the sound of falling rain; only, here it sounded like rain on a tin roof. The thought flashed through my mind that this might solve the problem of folks who like to go to sleep with the sound of rain on the roof. A small tin can with a few jumping beans in it, placed under a pillow, might bring about the desired effect.

The bartering was finally settled and Joaquin measured out the beans (he bought them at so much a liter), and paid the storekeeper.

"That fellow," said the jumping-bean king, "deals on the side in jumping beans. He buys small lots of as few as a dozen beans, at his store in the hills. The children bring them in for a piece of candy, or some other trinket, and he not only tries to make a profit on his merchandise, but he allows the boys and girls about half my price, in trade. Then when he gets here, he tries to get me to raise my fixed price for the season, because he insists that this is going to be a bad year, and the jumping bean crop will be terribly short. If I had come up to his price on this lot, all of the other village storekeepers would insist on the same; and I know from the brush telegraph that there is going to be a very good crop this year. The fellow will be back with another and much larger lot in a few weeks. Just wait and see."

I was beginning to see that the problems of buying and shipping several million jumping beans a year were by no means simple. To ship by the million a product that is collected by the dozen requires patience, organization and diplomacy. I got to know this man very well, later on, and found that he had a generous endowment of all of these qualities. He gave as much personal attention to a small boy or girl with a handful of beans, in a palm basket, as he gave to a man from some outlying area who had a hundred thousand for sale. He made a survey before each season and set the price, which was just the same regardless of quantity.

When I told him we were going to spend most of the summer at Rancho Guirocoba, he assured me that I would have ample opportunity to study the jumping bean and its gatherers, at first hand. I concluded, from his conversation, that the trees producing this odd "insect-plant" combination grew in a restricted area, less than a hundred miles across, and that Guirocoba was about in the center of that area.

He gave me a pamphlet, printed in English, which explained many of the facts about jumping beans and why they jump. In it I discovered that the name of the parent tree is *Sebastiania pringleii*, a euphorbiaceous plant, related distantly to the poinsettia and the castor bean. The small moth whose larvae cause the bean to jump is known by the scientific name of *Carpocaps asaltitans*. The pamphlet continued to explain that this moth laid its egg on the

flower of the jumping bean, and the tiny worm hatched and made its way into the forming seed pod. The jumping was accounted for by the worm striking its head against the side of the thin shell. The information was good, as far as it went; but I was interested in finding how the worm finally got out of the bean, and why they jumped in the first place.

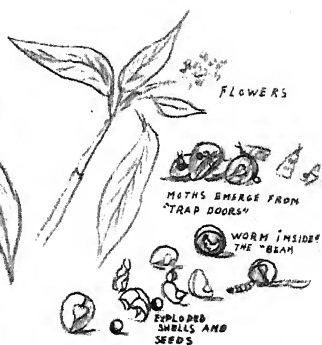
We did not have to look far from the ranch house to find jumping beans. They were one of the most common small trees in the area. The trunks and stems of the trees were slim and graceful, and the foliage was similar in shape to peach leaves, but somewhat glossier and more tropical looking. A broken stem or leaf bled a white latex, that the natives assured me was a deadly poison in any quantity; and when diluted beyond toxic strengths, was a violent quick-acting cathartic. They told me of a jealous suitor who attended the wedding of the girl who had jilted him, and managed to spike the punch at the wedding party with a broken twig of the jumping-bean tree. His revenge was swift and effective. When the excitement died away, no one had strength enough to go on with a wedding party, or anything else.

The native name for this plant is "yerba de flecha" (arrow plant). I have heard three different versions of how this name came about: one, that the juice was used to poison arrows; another, that the slim straight stems were actually used as arrow shafts by the early Indians; and the other, that when the seed pod ripens it "explodes" and hurls the seeds with the speed of an arrow. I can vouch for this latter characteristic, having been struck more than once by flying seeds—which are perfectly round and about the size and hardness of a BB shot.

The trees do not bloom at absolutely the same time, so I was able to study and photograph the small white flowers, the partially formed pods, and the ripe beans—still on the tree. This irregularity in blooming is the principal cause of partial failure of the jumping-bean crop, on bad years. The blossoms do not come at the time the majority of the moths hatch, and the trees set a higher percentage of normal seeds—and fewer jumping beans.

The first time I went out to gather a few jumping beans for myself, I stopped under a good-sized tree and was greatly encour-







aged by the rainlike sound around me. I had visions of filling my pockets in one spot. After half an hour, I had salvaged about two dozen jumpers, and began to realize that gathering these jitter-bugs of the thorn forest was not like picking up fallen walnuts. In the first place, one has to be very quiet to hear the beans jump at all. Some trees seem to be entirely free of the larvae, and the only way to tell whether a tree in question is productive is to stand still for a moment and see if the beans start jumping. If, as in my first case, they start their noise in the dry leaves, the next step is to try to locate them before moving. The sound of footfalls stops their jumping, as any sharp noise or jolt does, even after they have been collected. Either the beans make a great deal more noise than one would suspect, or they are harder to find than I had imagined at first. Their color is so like that of the leaves under the tree that they are really difficult to locate, even when they are in plain sight. Then, too, I soon discovered that the original reason for the jumping is to get the fallen beans with their larval occupants out of sight, under debris or stones, where they will be safe from birds and even large ants. These latter consider the jumping bean a "canned delicacy to be carried away for future use."

Experiments with a group of jumping beans turned loose under an average tree showed that after an hour most of them had been able to work their way under some sort of protection. In fact, many were wedged so securely that they could not be dislodged by the large black ants. The first time I noticed that these ants actually transported jumping beans was when I came upon a moving caravan of flowers, crossing my trail. The flowers were bright yellow, and a good half inch across. They were moving with the regularity of a truck convoy, and under each animated blossom was the motive power: a large black ant completely hidden by his fragrant burden. Now and then there was a break in the regularity of the procession, where a red or white flower appeared; and then I was surprised to see a jumping bean being pulled along. Presently two or three more appeared, and it was evident that these ants were taking the beans home for storage—along with their "vegetable supply." Some enterprising small boy should locate the hills where these beans are stored, wait until the ants have finished their harvest, and dig up

the hoard. I am sure it would net him a quantity of cheaply gathered "brincadores."

Having satisfied myself as to the reason for the jumping motion, I next started studying the worm itself—to discover if possible the actual mechanics of the jump. A slice, parallel with one of the flat sides of the pod, exposed the worm to view, but as soon as this was done it set about to weave a covering of silk over the opening, and none of its actions gave me a clue as to how it moved about. Accidentally, I happened to leave one of these cut beans on my table, open face down, on a sheet of paper. When I picked it up the next morning, the whole paper came with it. The worm had sewed itself securely to the flat paper surface. I sliced some more beans, and substituted cellophane from a cigarette package. The next morning I was happy to find that all of the worms had attached themselves, firmly, to the cellophane. By trimming carefully I had jumping beans with transparent windows. I could watch the worm's antics, to my heart's content. The larvae gradually covered the entire surface with silk, however, so that in a few days it was impossible to see clearly. I was able to watch them long enough to learn the mechanics of their movement.

The little worm has sixteen legs, the back four being stronger than the others and equipped with gripping feet. Each grub would move about in its shell, until it could get a good hold on the wall with the four hind feet, and then it would raise its body about two millimeters away from the shell, and slap the side of the bean with a sharp blow. This is what causes the bean to jump. I never saw one strike its head against the side, as had been formerly supposed.

Finally, bit by bit, I was able to piece together the whole life-story of this interesting partnership of plant and insect; and to me, it is one of the strangest sets of facts I have ever encountered.

The little gray moth has a life of only a few days, but during that time the females lay hundreds of eggs. This process of egg-laying on the flowers pollinates the rest of the cluster. There appears to be a direct relation between the moth and the reproduction of the plant, as in the inseparable yucca and yucca moth. Trees having no jumping beans produced no normal seeds. It would

appear that, if the moth does not get to that particular plant, it remains a sterile tree.

The little worm works itself into the ova of the blossom, and as the seed pod forms, the worm grows up with it. The pod is made of three separate sections, and normally produces three perfectly round seeds. When a jumping-bean larva makes its home in the pod, it is a progressive thing, like the migration to new quarters of the chambered nautilus. The larva does not damage the walls of the pod. It grows along with the normal ones, and cannot be distinguished from them, except when opened. It lives off the green seed in the first section, until it is time to change its skin. Then it gnaws a hole through the connecting wall into the next section, leaving its skin behind. This process is repeated a second, and finally, a third time. When the pod has reached full maturity, the worm has attained its maximum size, and its complicated set of instincts has started to function.

I have mentioned the fact that the normal seed pods of the "yerba de flecha" snap open with a sharp report when they are ripe, and throw their seeds like tiny shot. Instinct warns the larva of this, in some manner, and it seals this third chamber with a thin layer of tough silk, to keep it from flying apart. The other two sections of the pod have not been treated, so when the right time comes, they explode, sending the worm in its sealed pod on the first leg of its journey. Then it jumps until the pod has been wedged under something protective, and, once in such a spot, ceases to jump unless disturbed or exposed to light. During the next six months the beans are good jumpers, if they are moved about every few days:

At the end of six months the really startling example of instinct takes place inside the bean. The larva is ready to become a pupa, and it makes rather elaborate preparations. Since a moth has no teeth with which to cut its way out of the hard shell, the larva cuts a hole as an "escape hatch" for its other self. The small cut disk of shell is then attached in place by a layer of fine silk, and the larva again changes its skin and becomes a pupa inside of a tiny gauzy cocoon, which it has woven with its mouth, attached to the trap door.

To show that nature and instinct are not infallible and that

selection through survival of the fittest is still taking place, I studied several hundred jumping beans that had pupated. Five of the lot failed to cut holes in their shells like their fellows. Instinct had "slipped." I opened two of these and found they contained perfectly normal living pupas; one had even attached its filmy cocoon to the wall of the bean, but had failed to cut the door. The other had simply changed to a pupa without any preparation for the future. These two "unfit" fellows hatched at the same time as the normal ones, and appeared to be average looking and acting moths. I have little doubt that if they had been allowed to breed they would have produced an offspring with high percentage of error in the instincts necessary to survival. I opened the other three a week after the rest had hatched, and found small malformed moths, which had not developed normally because of the cramped conditions. They had died—paying the price of unfitness for survival. Man is nature's only creature which tampers with these laws regarding himself, and sometimes, the creatures about him. Thinking people can draw several useful lessons from the life history of the jumping bean.

Why such an interesting life cycle as this needs any "gilding" is beyond me, but I have seen some remarkable attempts at just that, in recent years. In 1942, I wrote an article which was published in the *Saturday Evening Post*, called "What Makes the Jumping Bean Jump?" This story precipitated a deluge of crank letters, the like of which I have never read before. A good many of them made no bones about calling me a romantic liar (in a nice way, of course). One woman assured me that the whole thing was a "lot of hokum." "Jumping beans," she contended, "are nothing but ordinary 'garbanzos' or chick-peas, with weevils in them."

There followed, for the next two years, a regular "rash" of short articles on jumping beans, some quoting my findings and other badly garbled pieces of misinformation. I think the high point was reached when a certain magazine published "an action photograph of a jumping bean, leaping as much as two inches." The caption under the picture went on to explain that the heat from the photographer's flood light had brought on these prodigious feats. Actually, I have placed jumping beans under all sorts of heat and

light, including infra-red and ultra-violet, and have never been able to make a bean leave the surface on which it was resting by as much as a quarter of its own width. Left alone for an hour, a jumping bean can cover a surprising distance in horizontal space, but none of the thousands I have had under observation ever tried to become aviators—even under photo flood lights.

In my patio at home I have a good many living mementos of my Sonoran trips, in the form of growing plants which have adapted themselves remarkably well to our desert climate. Two of the most prized are my seedlings of *Sebastiania pringleii*. They are higher than my head, now, and someday I hope to raise jumping beans right here in the yard where I can study them even more carefully, and record on photographic film each step of their development. I shouldn't wonder if there are still other facts to be discovered about these fascinating "jitterbugs" and their interesting host, the yerba de flecha.

## *The Burro and the Jaguar*

ONE morning a little boy ran up to the house to inform me that his burro had been badly hurt by a jaguar. This seemed mighty strange. Only a few days before, a large bull had been killed by one of the beasts. I went down to the village to see the victim and find out, if possible, how a burro so much smaller than a bull could survive the attack of so large a cat.

I was soon set right on the matter by one of the old men standing by. He said that a burro will fight to the last against any enemy, while a cow, or even a bull, will lose its head and either go into a complete panic or fly into a senseless unreasoning rage at the first pain from the cat's claws.

One of the crowd claimed to have killed a jaguar that had been badly crippled by a burro. It seems that when a jaguar lands on the back of a burro, it is met with two sharp hoofs in its stomach, which keep beating such a tattoo on its under side that the big cat is usually forced to drop off, where it is lucky if it does not receive blows from the front feet. A horse will give up almost at once, and even a mule is soon killed by the large beast, although it dies fighting. Only the burro, among the domesticated animals, is small and agile, yet tough and strong enough to keep bucking and kicking until a jaguar almost its own length is ready to call it quits.

An old woman came down to the burro with some salve made of local herbs, which she applied to the deep cuts on the poor beast's neck. It seemed to know that she was trying to help it, for it stood very still and looked on.

"The jaguar could not have killed this burro even had he been twice as big, Señor," she informed me. "See, he is a sacred burro; he has the sign of the Cross on his back. Christ takes care of such

burros, for they are the grandchildren of the one who bore the Cross." Then she launched into the story of how, on the day of crucifixion, Christ fell under the weight of the Cross and it was placed on the back of a donkey. The story goes that, before that day, this donkey had been just a plain mouse-colored beast like most of its brethren, but that after the crucifixion, the owner noticed that the shadow of the Cross remained in black on the burro's back.

"To this day all of the descendants of that fortunate beast carry the shadow of the Cross as a mark of special benediction," she said as she pointed out the dark ridge running down the animal's spine, crossed in the right proportions with bars running down each shoulder.

Everyone gathered around while the old woman fixed up the wounds, and several had stories to tell me of jaguars. They ranged all the way from tales of babies stolen from doorsteps to experiences where jaguars turned and fled upon meeting a lone man on the trail. I am more inclined to believe the latter, for very seldom is one of these great cats seen or killed without the aid of a pack of dogs. One is sometimes aware of their presence in the hills. I have found their fresh tracks inside of my own on returning from a walk, and heard their coughing a few hundred feet away; but never have I seen one outside of a cage.

I think the most astounding story was that of an old sheep herder who had the skin and the word of the entire village to back him up. He claims to have killed a very large jaguar with a big rock. His way of telling it made an otherwise impossible thing seem plausible. I hardly believe he would have the imagination to make the story up. He told it with the ease that comes from repetition:

"Señor, I am not surprised that you look doubtful when I, Manuel Vargas, a common sheep herder, claim to have killed a 'tigre' single-handed. I sometimes have difficulty myself. I am sure, Señor, that if I were to see another jaguar today I would run away as fast as my legs would carry me, but this is how it happened. I had my small flock back of the big ciénaga one afternoon. They were grazing in an open space, and I was lying in the shade of a sabino, looking up into the sky.

"Suddenly, Señor, it seemed that I heard or smelled something—I cannot decide which—and I felt the hair on the back of my neck come up like that on a dog when a stranger approaches. I looked to my sheep, and they were grazing quietly. Sheep are not sensitive animals, Señor. Suddenly I noticed something moving slowly along beneath the little palms near the water. It was a great tigre. The spots on its back caught the sunlight as it glided from light to shadow. It looked as big as the biggest bull on the ranch. I froze to the ground and held my breath. The tigre came closer, not making a sound; the sheep still grazed. I tried to call, but my mouth wouldn't open. The cat was near the sheep now. All at once I realized that it was stalking our pet little ewe, Maria. Her mother had died when she was young, and I had brought her home for the children to raise. She had grown up in the house like a member of the family. I couldn't let the tigre eat Maria.

"Suddenly I became very angry. If it had been any other sheep, I might have kept my senses and remained hidden; but now I picked up a large rock in both hands and got carefully to my feet. The tigre was so interested in the sheep by now that it paid no attention to me. It had its back to me and was creeping steadily toward Maria, who was still peacefully grazing. I thought I would raise the rock and throw it, then turn and run as fast as I could, but I knew the rock was too heavy to throw that far, so I kept getting a little closer. Suddenly the tigre sprang. The sheep let out a terrified bleat. That was too much for me. I forgot about throwing the rock. I rushed up to the cat, which was intent on the business of cutting the sheep's throat, and raised the rock as high as I could. I brought it down with all of my strength on the tigre's head. I heard it crack, but I took no chances. I took up other rocks and threw them till the tigre's head was a mass of blood.

"Maria died, so we ate her. It took me two days to find the rest of my flock. Sheep are not very bright animals, Señor. They run every direction when they are frightened."

The injured burro had listened intently with the rest of us. Now it raised its uninjured ear and ambled off to nibble some grass.

"He will recover soon," said the old woman as she put away her herbs.







## *Hill-country Maternity*

THE sketch of Antonita and her baby was the beginning of a painting which I called, "Brush Country Madonna." I used this particular young mother for the model, because she was so typical of the women of the back-country villages. Proud of their offspring, faithful to their husbands, and with a bearing like queens, these women face life, and its pains and problems with a fortitude beyond our comprehension.

The baby's name was Jesus; for he was the first son. Antonita was so very happy with him. She would sit for hours under the ramada, swing his hammocklike cradle with her foot, as she sewed little shirts for him to wear when he was old enough to walk. She would sing low, to her little son, to the rhythm of the swinging cradle; and nod a cheery greeting to us, as we passed. She carried him with her, down to the arroyo, when she went for water; and came back with the child on her hip, and the five-gallon olla of water on her head. When she washed the clothes in the big pool, she would nestle the child in a bed, made of her reboza. There he would lie, and coo at the motes in the sunbeams that filtered down through the cypress branches.

Antonita's husband, frankly, was not much, even by village standards. He did not plant all of his cornfield; and when he harvested it, he sold most of the crop and went to Alamos, leaving her and the baby at home. All he ever brought back was a terrific hang-over, and an evil temper; but Antonita never rebelled. It wasn't customary. Friends had warned her against marrying this worthless fellow. They told her he only wanted her because she happened to be the prettiest girl in the village. They said he would soon tire of her, and find another, when her youth started to fade.

They even prophesied that he wouldn't keep enough corn and beans in the house; but Antonita was young and in love. Her man was the finest dancer in the country; and he could ride a horse across the village square on its hind feet. He was a good-looking devil, too, and kept his horse and himself well groomed.

Now that she was married to him, a great many of the prophecies of her skeptical friends and relatives were coming true, but to offset these she had little Jesus. He was the light of her life. She probably hoped, and prayed to the Virgin, that her wayward mate would settle down at the next planting season, like the other men in the village; but she never indicated, by word or action, that she was unhappy or discontented with her lot.

She didn't need to tell us when her corn was all gone. The gossips of the neighborhood took care of that. We figured how much it would cost to keep the family (from the village store), until the green corn was ready to pick; and that was what I paid her for posing for the painting.

There was no simpering and compliment-fishing from Antonita, when I told her that I wanted to paint her picture with her baby. She didn't say, as American women I know would have said: "Really now, I never thought of myself as a subject for a painting. What in the world do you see in me?" She was proud that I had chosen her and her baby, and agreed as simply and naturally to posing as she would have to making a palm-leaf basket. I paid her a little in advance. Later, we could hear the pat-pat of her busy hands in the kitchen, making tortillas for her family. We felt a little better about Antonita.

The painting was finally done; and we had to leave the village for a couple of weeks. When we came back, we heard that little Jesus was very ill. It was the summer diarrhea, that takes so many. She smiled a wan smile when we stopped to see how they were; but there was a tragic resignation in her eyes, that almost broke our hearts. We wondered what we could do. The next morning we heard the sound of firecrackers in the village; and there was a crowd at Antonita's house. We knew, now, that the only thing left for us to do was to bring a bundle of candles to burn around the little cradle that night.





A few days after the funeral, we stopped by to see Antonita and discover if there was any way we could help. It was a pretty tough situation to handle. Her husband was off drinking away his sorrows, with some friends. The village gossips had already informed us that as soon as we left he had taken the money earned from her posing, and bought mescal. There had been no corn, no beans, no coffee; nothing to cook but the pigweeds that had come up with the first rains. These weeds are excellent greens, and I have enjoyed them more than any other green vegetable in Sonora; but a straight diet of them causes a violent diarrhea, that can become pretty serious. A few days of this sort of food, and Antonita was sick. A few more days, and her milk had made the baby sick. That was why she had lost her first-born son.

We commissioned her to make us some palm-leaf baskets, and paid her in advance. Then we sat; and she talked. Most mothers, newly bereaved, would have kept silence; but Antonita wanted to talk.

"He is a little angel now," she smiled, "with no more worries in the world. He can play at the footstool of God, and when his mother is unhappy, I am sure he will look down and intercede; for God so loves the little angels."

She continued with her beliefs. They were the things she had been taught, about life and death. She kept on talking, with an urgency that indicated how desperately she needed to believe these things. She wanted to hear them again and again. She must believe them, if she was to go on. Her tired face already looked ten years older.

She talked, then, of all the superstitions and practices pertaining to childbearing, when she found that we were interested. It was good for her to talk. She told us many things in her straightforward manner, without embarrassment or self-consciousness.

A birth in a Sonora village is an event of importance. Everyone knows when it is expected, and gathers round to get in the way of the midwives during the process. Mothers who live through the ordeal of childbirth, as Antonita described it, are real women.

Prenatal care, it seems, consists largely of a great many things that the expectant mother must avoid. From the first month that

she fails to wear her black skirt, she must try never to look at a snake. The sight of a snake may give the child a terrible disposition. She must drink very little water, and bathe no more in the arroyo. She must not, under any circumstances, dance; but it is all right to carry water, or work in the field, up to the day of delivery, and within a week after.

It is considered very good to boil the wedding ring in rain water, once a month; and drink the water. This is to prevent a miscarriage. Another preventative is to wear a red cloth tied next to the skin, over the abdomen. Prayers and candles to the Virgin are extra-important at this time; and care should be taken not to offend any of the saints, as they may become vindictive. She must avoid seeing or being around crippled or deformed children, as it might "mark" her child. Many such beliefs are shared, even today, in some of our own rural communities.

There are always the special occasions to be considered, such as an eclipse of the moon, during pregnancy. If such a thing occurs, the family and neighbors beat on pans and make all the noise they can, while they march the expectant mother around the house three times; then, she must throw water over her left shoulder onto the roof. This will prevent the child from having a harelip, or stammering. If the eclipse is a complete one, the situation is more serious. Unless considerable fuss is raised and firecrackers are fired during the total blackout, the child will be born a lunatic.

The actual delivery is usually rather simple, and inexpensive. The midwife charges three pesos for her services, and possibly another two for an assistant. If the family can afford it, and the midwife approves, there is the additional cost of a bottle of olive oil, and some quinine, to be administered the day before.

All sorts of "aids" are used in delivery. Such simple things as ropes, for the woman to pull against; small-mouthed gourds, to blow into, and large rocks in the bed, as braces for her feet, are some of the most common. We were even told of the Indian system, where they suspend the woman from four padded ropes, in a squatting position. The ropes, under her arms and knees, are brought together and tied to a single rope, that is thrown over the ridgepole of the house. A blanket is stretched tight, three feet below



the patient; and when the pains begin, the rope is snubbed around the pole. With each pain, the woman is raised about eighteen inches, and allowed to drop that distance; to be stopped, suddenly, by the tension of the rope. About three such drops, properly timed, and a "champagne-cork delivery" results. Someone catches the baby, when it strikes the stretched blanket. This method is a little rugged, but very efficient. It certainly doesn't prolong the agony to the extent of some "civilized" births I have witnessed.

The midwife cauterizes the umbilical cord with a red-hot iron, and wraps the child up in several layers of white cloth, prepared for the occasion. The darkest corner of the room, away from all semblance of a draft, is considered the only safe place for a newborn child. The light of day, or a breath of fresh air, is considered fatal. I am sure a good many otherwise healthy infants smother in hot weather; but this is the custom.

There is no notion of sterilization or sanitation, beyond the idea that no water of any kind can touch the mother or child for forty days and forty nights. Dry, white cloths are used to clean them up, as best they can; and the mother's abdomen is wrapped very tightly with bands of white cloth which must not be removed, for any reason, for the same period of forty days and nights. If at the end of this period both mother and child are still alive, it is a pretty sure sign they are going to survive; and they are allowed to live, normally.

If puerperal fever, or other infection, develops after childbirth, the relatives seldom call in a doctor until they should be out getting lumber for the coffin.

In spite of (or perhaps because of) all this, most Sonora women are a fine sturdy lot; and the children are healthy and strong. The population is on the increase; and most of the available corn land is now under cultivation. Anyone bringing in reforms that would cut down infant mortality should precede them by some means for supporting the additional population. Babies arrive with an appalling regularity in the hill country. That's what the neighbors keep telling Antonita.

"Don't grieve so," they say, "you'll have another one before long. Everyone does."

## *The Art of Making Good Tortillas*

**M**Y SKETCHES of Chavelita making tortillas remind me not only of one of the most graceful girls I have ever known, but of the importance of the tortillas themselves.

Tortillas taste as near like nothing, to the uninitiated palate, as any food I can think of. They contain no salt or other seasoning, and their texture is far from pleasing to the average North American, upon first trial. Like a good many other things, however, I find that this food improves with acquaintance and, when properly made by one who really puts her heart into it, they are true masterpieces of the culinary art.

Today, due to mechanical grinding and machine stamping, this staple is threatened with the mediocrity that has befallen white bread in the United States, since the advent of the commercial bakery took breadmaking out of the household kitchen. Some of the leathery lifeless things that are served, days old, and warmed over, in restaurants along the border, are enough to turn a man against the food for life. These are produced by machinery, from unsorted corn which has been soaked chemically, ground mechanically, rolled out with rollers, and stamped out into perfectly round disks which are baked on a mass-production basis. They can be easily spotted because of their uniformity of size and shape, but anyone used to eating tortillas can tell them in one nibble, blindfolded.

Fortunately it will be a long time before such mechanical "improvements" come to the hill country, and girls like Chavelita are still being brought up with the idea that making tortillas, properly, is one of the three requisites of a good wife. There are as many different kinds of tortillas as there are women to make them, and





they reflect the character of their creators more than any other food that I have ever tasted.

I watched Chavelita, one day, as she put the corn in an olla to soak in lime water. She first sorted and washed the kernels carefully, discarding any imperfect or darkened ones that would produce a bad flavor. The next day, after the corn had softened to a sort of hominy and the skins were peeling away from each kernel, I saw her wash the mass and rinse it several times. Then she took a few handfuls over to the stone metate placed beside the clay stove, and began gently crushing the corn into a paste with the "mano stone." This long stone, with one flat side, is held in both hands by the tip ends, and rubbed down the slanting slab of the metate with a little of the soft corn at each stroke.

A lazy woman suffices with working the "masa," as it is called, over the grinding stone but once or possibly twice, but a girl who has pride in her tortillas doesn't stop there. Chavelita worked the pasty meal over and over again, gathering it up in her hands and feeling it between her fingers to see if it was fine and uniform enough to make me the tortillas that she would be proud of. Crudely worked masa produces thick tortillas of uneven consistency and a leathery texture.

When she finally felt that the masa had reached the proper consistency, she gathered it up into a ball and placed it in a pottery bowl under a clean dishcloth. Then she set a large pottery pan about twenty inches in diameter and three inches deep over the open fire on the clay platform that served as a stove. A few more sticks of aromatic palo colorado were added to the flame, and she took a small ball of the masa and shaped it into the final tortilla.

This is an art, itself, and is best accomplished to the rhythm of a song of the hills, hummed to the accompaniment of the patting of the hands. Gradually the little ball of dough emerges into a flat disk, not too thick nor too thin, and light but firm. A heavy-handed woman can make tortillas fast, but the force of her blows, as she pats, takes the life out of the dough and the result is tough and leathery. Chavelita's dainty hands seemed to have just the right touch; modeling, but never squeezing, the dough, and coaxing it gently into proper shape.

I could hardly wait as she placed the first tortilla on the pottery pan to bake. It was made right, for it swelled as it baked, with a tiny puff in the middle; and when she handed it to me, steaming hot, with a cup of freshly roasted and brewed coffee, I could understand why this food is so highly esteemed in the hills. The flavor was delicate but unmistakably the flavor of the Mexican white corn. Although a little salt may be sprinkled on before eating, salt added to the masa would probably destroy this delicate flavor.

The average American, visiting Mexico, shouldn't give up on the first sorry mess of tortillas that are set, warmed over, in front of him in some city café. It takes time to find a maker of good tortillas, as it does to discover a place that will serve really good griddle cakes of any kind. That is why I usually try to get a look at the cook before I eat, if there is a choice of eating places. One can tell by the way she dresses and walks whether she is proud and alert and a maker of good tortillas, or slovenly and dirty and a maker of terrible ones.

I have been asked by fellow countrymen about the purpose of all this handling of food. I can only refer them to the excellent bread their grandmothers baked and remind them of how it was kneaded by hand and shaped into loaves, and ask them if they would not trade several loaves of the modern "untouched by human hands" variety for just one slice. In Sonora, they have a saying about the savor de mano, or flavor of the hands; something about "The sweeter the girl the more savory the tortillas." I have met more than one instance where one look at the cook dispelled any romantic ideas concerning "savor de mano," but anyone who could find anything objectionable about hands like Chavelita's simply doesn't have an ear for music.

Memories are composite things, made up of sights, sounds, smells and sentiments, so closely interwoven they are impossible to untangle. One of the pleasantest of such, which I carry with me from the Sonora hill country, is the soft light of sundown filtering through the trunks of cypress trees, the pungent smell of wood smoke mingled with the odor of coffee and baking tortillas, and Chavelita standing in the door of a palm-thatched hut, patting tortillas and humming sweetly to the rhythm of her busy hands.

## *La Piedra Pesada*

FROM time to time someone in the village mentioned a heavy rock called "La Piedra Pesada." I had bought odd ore or crystal specimens that had been brought to me, so now and then these surveyors of mineral specimens would ask me what I knew of the "heavy rock." I tried to get descriptions that would give me an accurate picture, but verbal descriptions by untrained observers are seldom much good, especially when they are in a foreign language.

They said that it lay on a hillside beside a very old trail, and had been an object of curiosity to countless passers-by, for several generations. The rock was dark-gray to black, according to varying accounts, and smooth, like a water-worn boulder. The two things which had attracted attention were the facts that there were no other rocks resembling it, in this country of limestone and sandstone, and that it was so extremely heavy for its size. Many amusing accounts were given of bets lost by newcomers who thought that they could lift the boulder. One narrator added that when the rock was struck it gave off a bell-tone.

The evidence, as it began to accumulate, pointed strongly to the possibility that this might be an undescribed meteorite. I have a fair collection of these interesting bits of metal and stone, from outer space, and have known Dr. Harvey Nininger, the great meteorite collector, since I was a small boy. Naturally, with these interests in the subject, I resolved that the occurrence must be investigated before I left the country. There seemed to be no hurry, however, because the heavy stone had remained there beside the trail for a long long time, and was not likely to be carried away in the next few months.

I was discussing the stone with my friend, Doc, one morning, while we drank our usual cup of coffee together. He remembered someone calling his attention to the stone as he passed on the trail several years ago, but he had frankly paid little attention to the matter, and had not actually examined the curiosity. As we sat there talking, a young man came riding into the yard from another village, with a request for medicine for a very sick woman. His diagnosis of the case was vague, to say the least, but he felt that Doc would be able to understand and send just the right medicine back with him, to cure his mother.

Doc patiently explained that American medicines are specifics, and must be used each for its individual purpose; that he had no "magic cure-all" in his possession, with which he could treat a patient that he had never seen. The boy was somewhat taken aback with this news, but still insisted that there must be something that could be done, as his mother was dying. After considerable more discussion, a decision was reached that Doc would drive to the village in his old Ford, and examine the woman. He was careful to warn the young fellow that he would not guarantee a cure, even after examination and treatment, and took advantage of the situation to deliver a little lecture on the importance of calling a doctor early in a case, instead of as a final resort.

When the boy started back to deliver the news that a doctor was on the way, Doc happened to remember that the stone that we had been discussing was very near to the village he was to visit. The old Ford could go as far as the village, and while he was attending the patient, I could get a horse and guide, and ride the short distance up the trail on the mountain, and see the "Piedra Pesada."

We were packed and ready to go in no time. Doc's red-headed mozo cranked the flivver, and after a few preliminary coughs and lurches the motor purred as sweetly as a rock crusher. There was something almost animate in that Ford. It had been driven for so long, over roads never touched by other wheels, and repaired with so many pieces of rawhide and baling wire that it had a flexible undulating pace as it rode over the bumps. When we struck side-hill stretches where the road simply followed the original contour



of the hill, that car seemed to squat down and hug the inside of the trail like a live thing. There were so many loose joints in its frame that it seemed to adjust itself to every rut and gully we had to traverse. In fact, it appeared at times to have developed a sort of knee action, from long contact with such uneven terrain.

Doc and I sat in front, while the red-headed mozo rode standing on the rear bumper. This was so he could step off at an instant's notice and push on an extra steep spot, or when fording a stream. He had several spare tires, attached at various points of the flivver's anatomy, and plenty of tools to change them in a hurry if the need arose. It was a good thing that there were several spares, for none of them had a very reassuring appearance. Doc explained that he had found that it was much cheaper and more efficient to travel with a mozo, to do all the tire-changing, cranking and pushing. It saved him for the job ahead, at the end of the journey. Then, of course, he had a messenger that could be sent back on foot, for help, should the car break down completely. It didn't take me long to agree with the wisdom of his system.

We were traveling over what was actually just a very wide horse trail, up one hill and down another, over low rolling country. Every couple of miles we had to recross a small stream, and each crossing was a minor adventure. Cattle and horses turned over rocks in the bottom that might be dangerous for the oil pan. High water had, in some cases, cut the banks so that they were not navigable until minor repairs had been made. We stopped at each crossing while the mozo waded ahead and felt out the bottom with his toes. If the bank was too steep, he would get out the shovel and remedy the matter. Finally, when everything was all in order, we would crank the engine and Doc would make a run for it. In most cases the water was too deep to ford without killing the engine; so the only way was to use the momentum gained in the run. Doc would back the flivver up and race the engine, to be sure that it was hitting on all four, and then swoop down the bank and across the little stream with one bumping, lurching dash. The water would fly twenty feet in the air, and when the mist had subsided, there would be Doc and the flivver, panting and steaming on the other side. The engine would be completely drowned, but it was so hot,

it was only a matter of a few minutes until all of the water had left the motor, in the form of steam. Doc had made a rubber protector for the distributor and wiring. This kept the parts fairly dry, so that as soon as the water boiled away from the spark plugs, we would crank up and be on our way.

Finally we came to a rattling stop in a cloud of dust, and when the dust had subsided, I could see we were in the square of a rather attractive village. The first thing that I noticed was the fact that the houses were of adobe, instead of the usual stick-and-mud construction. They all had windows and doors. This was quite a variation from Guirocoba and other villages in the neighborhood, where the Mayo Indian style of architecture still prevails.

The boy who had ridden to get Doc was waiting for us. (A horse can usually make much better time than an auto over this sort of trail.) He led us through the assembled throng of assorted children and dogs to the house where the woman lay. Everyone gathered round while Doc questioned the patient and the family about the woman's condition and symptoms. He took her pulse and got out his stethoscope and listened to the heart and lungs. All doctors start with this procedure in Sonora. The patient and family would feel pretty badly cheated if the form wasn't followed, even if the malady was a broken leg. In this case, it turned out that the dear old woman had simply become constipated, and had stayed that way an incredibly long time. Doc could have sent the necessary medicine by the boy, had he been informed of this simple fact, rather than the horrible details of the intense pain, loss of appetite, yellowish complexion, and violent headaches; but that would have been expecting too much.

Doc fished in his bag and extracted some pills which he administered immediately, and hoped that it would not be too late for the remedy to take effect. He said he had never seen such a toxic patient from so simple a malady. I am no judge of such things; but she sure looked "not long for this world," as they say in this country.

We came back into the blinding sunlight of the plaza, and were greeted by a very genial young couple who insisted that we have lunch at their house. The woman was carrying a baby, and it was





easy to see she was fairly bursting with pride over this, her first-born. Doc had to inspect the little fellow, thoroughly, when we got to their house, for this child was in a way of being a famous personality, at the age of five months.

There had been some trouble at the time of birth, and the father had wisely called in Doc, to manage the difficult delivery. Calling in a doctor for such a minor thing as childbirth was practically an unheard of thing. It had started controversies among the other women of the village, that were still raging. The couple were especially interested in keeping the child free from even the mildest ailments, so that Doc's reputation and their judgment would not suffer from the wagging tongues of the community. The local midwife had been pretty "sore" when the father had called in a doctor. She had predicted all sorts of dire results. If the child grew up healthy and normal, or above normal, he would represent a milestone in brush-country medical practice.

While we were talking, the woman had kindled the fire for coffee, and set the pot of beans on the stove. She took the baby from Doc and stood, silhouetted in the doorway, nursing the child. Her husband was pleased and surprised, when I put my sketchpad on my knee and made a quick drawing of her. They were a fine couple. I enjoyed our meal with them more than many I have eaten in much finer surroundings.

There was no use trying to see the "Piedra Pesada" until after the siesta hour, so we accepted palm mats, spread for us under the shade of the ramada, and took our midday nap, along with the rest. I was awakened by the sound of hammering and sawing, so I got up to see who was so ambitious. Across the village square, several men were starting back to work in a sort of carpenter shop, made of upright poles supporting a shade, like the ramada in front of most houses, except that this was much larger.

They seemed proud of their work, when I stopped to watch. It dawned upon me where all the doors and windows had come from, in the village. These chaps were making a set of doors for the home of a General who lived some fifty miles away. They were considered the best carpenters of this sort in the country, and I could readily see why. The workmanship was superb. Their tools

were the crudest looking I have ever seen. Most of them were home-made by the carpenters themselves, but the results were astounding. Joints were perfect and the designs, structurally, very sound. A finished door was propped against the poles in one end of the shade, and I saw that they had not been satisfied with simply building a fine door. They had covered it with really artistic carving. Sometime, I would like to have some of these doors made for a house of mine. They have real character.

The wood they were using was so near an ivory-white that I thought it must be very light and soft, but it turned out to be amapa wood, which has approximately the hardness and density of oak. The fact that this fine wood was to be had nearby was the determining factor in the grandfather of this group settling in this particular village. He had thrived in spite of the long haul to a market for his products; and now these brothers and cousins, his descendants, were still carrying on. I was reminded of the man who built a better mousetrap.

When I returned to the car, Doc had a couple of horses ready, and a boy who was willing to trot along and show us the heavy rock. It was not very far up the trail. At least it didn't seem very far, after the excellent lunch and restful siesta. I don't think we had traveled more than two miles before the boy stopped in the trail and pointed ahead at a large black rock to our left.

I climbed out over the door that had ceased to function, and eagerly approached the smooth odd-looking rock. It had no rust on its surface, so I was almost convinced at once that it was not a meteorite, but there are always exceptions to every rule; so I continued my examination. The stone did give off a bell-like note when I struck it with my prospector's pick, but it was not metallic.

Even under a miner's sixteen-power glass, there were no particles of metal apparent, to account for the extreme weight. It appeared to be a very compact basalt of volcanic origin, but it was distinctly out of place. The whole hill was a steep mass of limestone. How this smooth, well weathered chunk of volcanic material came to be on that hill was, and still is, a real mystery to me. I was not too disappointed, because I have learned that in order to bring anything of this sort to light, it is necessary to follow at least

a hundred "wild-geese chases" to discover one authentic specimen. It had been a wonderful trip, and I had seen a still different type of village life.

When we rode back into the little settlement, there was a great crowd of people in front of the house where the sick woman lived. I was apprehensive, thinking she had probably died; but Doc came back with a wry smile on his face.

"No, she isn't dead," he replied to my inquiry. "The pills have just started to work like hell, and the rest of the neighborhood is interested in getting a round-by-round report of the details."

## *Car Trouble at Cajon*

AS I look back over my trips to Sonora I am startled by the fact that many of the nicest things that happened to me were the direct results of car trouble on the rough back-country roads. New highways are being rushed to completion, and the time draws near when tourists can whizz from one large city to another, with the same ease as they would on the boulevards at home.

When this day finally comes, travelers in Sonora are going to miss a great deal of wonderful scenery, and fail to meet some of the finest and most interesting people. Every time I have had a breakdown, in this country, it has turned out to be a "blessing in disguise."

I had picked up a rather violent case of malaria, down on the coast, and had been a sick man for some weeks. In fact, some of my native friends in the village had gone so far as to start building my coffin, when the fever finally broke. Being up and about again, I decided to drive into Alamos for a few days. At Cajon I came to a stop at the ford in the arroyo, as usual, and waded in to see how it was. It was a little deep, but I decided I could make it, by following Doc's tactics of rushing through and letting the engine dry off on the other bank, from its own heat.

The theory was all right, but somehow I didn't quite execute the maneuver. My motor choked and died in midstream. There had been rain the night before, and the muddy water was swirling past at quite a rate. The engine itself was inundated, and water was coming up through the floor boards.

A crowd soon collected. Presently someone came down from the little settlement with a team of mules, to drag me out. I realized



that it would be futile to try to start the engine after this long immersion, so I had them pull my truck back into the village of Cajon, where I could work on it. Things looked pretty discouraging. A lot of my luggage was wet. Before doing anything else, I hauled it out to dry. Finally I got round to the car, and found that it was still dripping wet with muddy water. The wires were all so soaked that I decided the only thing I could do was to clean out the distributor, wipe everything off, and allow the wiring to dry overnight.

Doña Isabella, who operates the village store, came over to see if she could be of any service. She suggested I put all my things inside her fence, where they wouldn't be bothered while drying; and offered me the hospitality of her house. I had always admired Doña Isabella. This middle-aged widow had managed to make quite a success in the village with her little trading store. Now she was also a cattle owner, and had other interests that assured her children a sound position in the community. All this, in a land where women seldom do anything but keep house, was a greater accomplishment than can be imagined by women of this country who face the business world on an equal footing with men. I gladly accepted her invitation and moved in.

My hostess apologized for the plain fare of tortillas and beans, as we sat around her table at the evening meal, but promised on the morrow to have something special for me. I assured her that this was what I wanted; to be treated just like anyone else, not a "visiting priest." Her ample form shook with chuckles as she replied that I was "muy simpático," but that she seldom had guests, and that guests were a good excuse for cooking something extra. After supper, we sat around and talked with other villagers who gathered under the ramada. I felt more at home with these people, since I had been thrown on their mercy, than I had ever felt just as a passing friend. It was a good feeling, and when I spread my sleeping bag on an extra rawhide bed in the yard, I had forgotten all the trouble of the day, and slept like a child.

The next morning I was awakened by the cheery crackle of the cookfire in the kitchen and the smell of fresh-ground coffee. My hostess had been concerned about my thinness. (I had lost

thirty pounds in my bout with the estivo-autumnal malaria.) My skin was, also, too white to please her. She said I needed something to build up my blood, and she had sent a boy to cut some "palo dulce" for a tea.

It was an excellent breakfast of papaya, tortillas, and an omelette made with fine-chopped onion tops and green chilis. This, with several cups of her home-roasted coffee, made a meal fit for any king. I told her so, and she smiled her infectious smile, and went back into the kitchen to fetch me another cup of coffee. She said she wished me no hard luck, but she hoped the car wouldn't run right away, so she would have a chance to build me up. She had also dispatched a couple of boys to bring in a cow to milk. Fresh milk is considered a delicacy in these parts, and is thought to be a cure-all for convalescents.

I went out to the car, and found that her wish had been granted with a vengeance. The wet wires had shorted my battery out, and it was as dead as a battery can get. There was nothing to do but to send it in to the nearest mechanic, thirty miles away, to be charged. This meant a day, on the way by burro, a day for charging, and a day to return.

Doña Isabella beamed when I told her the news. She was whittling small shavings from a piece of hard dark wood when I came into the kitchen. Putting them in a pot of cold water, she explained that this was the "palo dulce" for my tea, and that now she would have a chance to prove to me how good it was. The wood chips would have to soak for an hour, in cool water, to produce the medicinal tea. Hot water would spoil it. I left her, after promising to be back and drink my medicine, and went in search of a man who would take my battery into Alamos. It was a slack season, and there were plenty of men and burros in the community. We removed the battery and lashed it, securely, with a padding of grass, between the cross pieces of a pack saddle. In less than an hour, my battery transportation was solved. I watched them disappear around a bend in the trail, from Doña Isabella's front yard, and wondered how I would spend the next three days.

The tea turned out to be quite a surprise. Most herb teas I have sampled have been either so very bitter or so highly aromatic that





it was a toss-up whether the disease or the cure was to be most dreaded. This concoction had a delicate flavor, something like a very mild Chinese tea. I sat and sipped it in the darkness of the kitchen, and remarked jokingly to Doña Isabella that it could hardly be of any help, since it wasn't bitter at all. She laughed, and suggested that I take my glass out into the sunlight and look at it. I was again surprised, for the liquid was a brilliant blue-green, as if it had been dyed with some highly fluorescent dye. On closer inspection, I found that this bluish color was indeed a fluorescence, and that the actual color of the tea, when viewed by transmitted light, was a rich reddish orange. I had to whittle some shavings, myself, and soak them in water, before I could believe that this strange color had been derived, solely, from this rather ordinary looking piece of wood. Doña Isabella said that I was to drink no plain water, but to try and take as much of this tea as possible. There was no limit to the dose. The more I could absorb, the sooner I would feel stronger and start gaining weight and color.

Whether it was the tea or Doña Isabella's cooking I am not prepared to state, but before I left Cajon, I was eating like a horse and feeling a hundred percent better. I brought several pieces of the wood back to the States, but found no doctor interested enough to really find out what it contained, or whether it had any medicinal value.

It was an Indian tea for curing fever that led the way for the medical profession to accept the active ingredient of cinchona bark (quinine sulphate) for the cure of malaria. Cinchona and its relatives have been known as specifics for fevers, under the name of "palo amargo" (bitter wood), for countless centuries, by jungle natives. Palo dulce (sweet wood) had been used by Sonoran tribes, as a tonic, to build up the weakened patient, after the fever had broken. I still feel that its investigation might prove profitable. I have pieces of this wood in my possession that are now several years old. It takes longer to produce a solution of strong color than it did when the wood was fresh, but otherwise I see no signs of deterioration. I tried heating the tea, and found that as soon as it neared the boiling point it permanently lost its blue-green fluorescence and acquired a different flavor. If a concentrate is to be prepared, it

will have to be done under vacuum, to insure the stability of the drug. The tea is only good for about two days, in warm weather. On the third day it sours and develops a vile odor—like the water in a vase of neglected flowers.

The people of the neighborhood knew that I was interested in buying odd minerals and crystals, so I was not surprised when a small boy came up to me in the yard with a bright little quartz crystal, for sale. I had plenty of these, but rather than disappoint the child, I accepted the crystal and gave him a five-cent copper. He stood there acting displeased, and I asked him what was wrong. He replied that this was a very special crystal, and was worth at least a dime. I took it back out of my pocket and held it up to the light. Something moved, inside; and I realized that the boy had been more than right. The crystal contained a small cavity of water that had been trapped, while it was forming. A little bubble of air or gas moved freely about inside, like the bubble in a spirit level. I assured the boy that he was entitled to more for such a specimen, and gave him a peso for it. His eyes bulged out like a frightened frog, and he took off on a dead run to spread the news to the other boys of the settlement. I began wondering if I had made a wrong move in paying so much for a sample. This would establish a price which I would be bound to pay in the future. After considering the chances of their finding more with water inclusions, however, I decided that I would let things ride and see if nature had repeated its unusual feat of trapping and preserving million-year-old water in walls of crystal.

That afternoon I was besieged by a stream of boys who had crystals of every sort and size. I asked them where they had found them, and they vaguely replied "muy lejos" (very far away). Only three of the crystals were as good as the one brought by the original boy. The rest had either imaginary bubbles or such minute ones that the boys themselves had to turn the crystals around a good many times, to relocate them. I was astounded at the sharpness of their eyes. They were able to see with the naked eye bubbles that became plainly visible to me only under a mineralogist's glass. I never discovered the source of these mineral novelties, but I was able to purchase several more before I left the village.

That afternoon there was a considerable commotion in the corral; back of the home of Doña Isabella. Dust came up in clouds, and shouts and laughter were punctuated by the frantic bawling of an obviously frightened cow. I went over to see if they were having a branding or something. Half of the town had collected around the corral to watch the excitement, and I was informed that this was the milk cow they had brought in from the hills, and there would be a milking in due course of events, when the beast had been properly subdued.

Finally, the cowboys trussed the beast up with ropes from her neck and all four legs, and tied each rope to a different side of the corral. She could not move an inch. She reminded me of an overgrown fly, caught in a gigantic spider web. Then the calf was brought in, and one of the vaqueros gingerly approached with a bucket. The calf, held under control by two boys astraddle its back, was allowed to suck one teat while the cautious milker worked on the rest. It was the oddest exhibition I had ever seen, and I wished some of my dairymen friends, in the States, could have witnessed it. The milk, although not very plentiful, was rich and was a pleasant addition to my diet.

That night Doña Isabella produced a sort of pudding or custard, made from fresh milk, crushed green corn, and eggs. It was sweetened with the native brown sugar, called *panocha*; and flavored with extract, that consisted of cane alcohol, in which vanilla pods were soaked. It was one of the tastiest bits of hill-country cookery I have ever enjoyed.

The next day I spent most of my time drinking the cold "palo dulce" tea, and fishing in the arroyo. The fishing was not good, but it was nice to sit and gaze with half-closed eyes at my bobber, floating on the sun-dappled surface of the pool, and listen to the laughter and drumming of girls, bathing in the arroyo below, and to the chatter of countless birds in the cypress overhead. Since I had to wait, I couldn't have picked a pleasanter spot. My catch totaled two small perch, which I gave to a little girl who had patiently watched my efforts for hours. The two tiny fellows wouldn't have been a starter, for Doña Isabella's family.

I returned in the afternoon to find that my hostess was making

cheese. She had simply warmed the fresh milk over the stove, and added a few seeds from a plant belonging to the solanum family. Then she poured the thickening mass into a wooden trough, and by suppertime she had drained the whey away from a really excellent white cheese, resembling the so-called Philadelphia cream cheese, on our markets. She explained that she never allowed the milk to turn sour, to make this sort of "quick cheese"; that the addition of the "cheese seeds" was enough to do the trick. That night she made a dish which she called "chillicalil." She cut tortillas into quarters and dropped them into a pan of hot lard, for a moment. This caused them to open up on the cut edges. Taking some of the white cheese and fine-chopped onion, she stuffed each quarter with this mixture and placed it on the table beside her. When the pieces were all stuffed, she placed them in layers in a large kettle and covered each layer with a hot sauce, which was boiling on the stove. The hot sauce was composed of red chilies and tomatoes, with a little garlic, and a few oregano leaves. The dry red chilies had been steamed and pressed through a colander, to produce a deep red paste, to which peeled fresh tomatoes were added, and the whole mass was cooked over a very slow fire. When the kettle was full of stuffed tortillas, a layer of cheese and onions was placed on too, and a heavy lid was added. She scraped a hole in the ashes, and placed the heavy iron kettle in the middle, like a Dutch oven. When the mass had baked sufficiently to melt the cheese, it was ready to serve. The result was somewhat like a very good enchilada, but a little different.

The next day was spent fishing, and I had better luck. Some small boys brought me just the right sort of grubs, and I caught a nice mess of catfish. In fact, I had enough extra to give a fine fish to each of my three bait-gatherers. I was still drinking the "palo dulce" tea, and feeling better by the hour. It almost seemed a shame that my battery would arrive that night, and I would have no further excuse to stay.

The battery did arrive, just at sunset, while my hostess was busy preparing the catfish for supper. The burro-driver tied his beast to a post outside, and came in to report and to bring me my mail. We were sitting there, smoking and talking of the condition of the



trail, when a terrible commotion, outside, brought us to our feet. The burro had decided that this was the end of his journey, and, if he was not going to be unloaded, he would take the matter into his own hands. He was bucking like a rodeo mustang. Parts were flying, this way and that, from the pack. Suddenly, the whole thing came off over his head, battery and all, and before we could get to it, all the acid had run out on the ground. For a moment, I was almost speechless with anger. Then, someone in the crowd started to laugh, and I joined them. I thought they were laughing at my plight, but I soon found it was the strange conduct of the burro that was causing all the hilarity. A few drops of the acid had spattered on his hide, and he had felt the burn, and tried to lick it off. Now he was a very unhappy burro, indeed; and it served him right.

All of a sudden, the burro-driver seemed to realize his predicament, and he broke forth in a volley of denunciations in which he managed to blame me for everything. If I had not offered him the cigarette, when he came in, he would have unloaded the battery, as he should have, and his poor beast would not have been burned, nor his leather bag damaged by my abominable battery acid. He demanded payment, at once, for the trip and the damage to his burro and harness, naming a sum wholly beyond reason. I saw that if I conceded, he would have me where he wanted me, and demand still more, so I flatly refused to pay him a cent until he had taken the battery back to Alamos, and returned again with it in working order. As for the burro, his skin would grow back. The crowd that had gathered was all for me in the matter, stating that this fellow knew better than to leave a load on this particular burro after it had reached home. This, they assured me, was his regular trick. The fellow still ranted, until Doña Isabella came out and started to shout. Finally, by sheer force of volume she forced him to listen. The things she called that man were something to hear. As her tirade progressed, it became more picturesquely expressive; and by the time she had finished, all of us, including the burro-driver, were spellbound with admiration. When she ran out of breath, she turned on her heel and strode back into the kitchen without so much as a glance over her shoulder.

At last, I understood how this woman had been able to hold her

own against men, and build up her present business. The burro-driver picked up the wrecked harness and led his now chastened jackass away, with never a word. The next morning when I had cooled off, I sent word over to him that if he would take the battery back to Alamos, and have it fixed again, I would pay him, in full, for both trips and for a reasonable damage to his saddle bag; but that the burro would have to grow new skin on his rump and tongue, with no heart balm from me. For the burro, I still had no sympathy.

I had three more days at the home of Doña Isabella in the village of Cajon de Sabino. They were three of the pleasantest days I ever spent. The rest and the palo dulce had made me feel so well that I took a short ride on one of her horses, every forenoon; and spent each afternoon by the lazy pool in the arroyo, fishing and dreaming in the cool shade I hated to leave.

The night before I left, the villagers gathered in front of the little store and serenaded with two guitars and a wheezy mouth organ. It was a touching farewell, and I shall never forget them as long as I live.

## *The Sixteenth of September*

SKETCHES of girls singing and dancing at the Governor's party remind me of the eventful sixteenth of September that I spent in Alamos. I have helped celebrate this national holiday in other parts of Mexico, but this particular time and place will always flash before my mind's eye when I think of the sixteenth.

I had been away for a few days, and did not get back to Alamos until late in the evening of the fifteenth. No one was at home in the Dow house, so I let myself in with my key to the back door, and hurriedly changed to white clothes so I could walk down town. I had never seen the town so deserted; there wasn't a sound from the houses around me. It gave me an odd feeling, as if I had returned a hundred years too late and the populace had disappeared. I felt like walking on tiptoe.

The streets and shops were empty; even the cantinas were closed. I walked to the plaza to see if there was any life there, and the only thing I could find was a drunken Indian, sitting on a bench, who could not answer my questions. He was voluble enough in his replies, but completely incoherent. Suddenly there was a burst of music up the street. I could see light, and the shadowy mass of a crowd, milling around in front of the Palacio Municipal. I had found the missing-population of Alamos, including most of the children and dogs.

Inside, a grand town party was going on. The outgoing Presidente was turning over the city and district to his newly elected successor. There was dancing, with music and speeches. The main floor was crowded with dancing couples, dressed in their very best. Both upper and lower balconies groaned with packed loads of spec-

tators, and the rest of the town stood out in the street and listened to the music.

The orchestra, on the stage, was composed principally of tradesmen of Alamos: men who ran small stores, tended bars, did carpentry or blacksmithing. My friend, the local coffin maker, who had contracted to make me a set of picture frames, seemed to be the leader. He was busily slapping the bass, and directing the others with noddings of his head and occasional swift gestures of his hand. I like the idea of using home talent. The musicians were really very good, and certainly more fitting for the time and place than anything they could have imported from a larger city.

Another thing that pleased me was the mixing of the social strata on the dance floor. For the most part, girls and boys of the "higher" and "middle" classes were dancing with partners of their own set, but the fact that our kitchen maid was tripping the light fantastic with her Maya boy friend, and rubbing shoulders with members of the oldest families in town, showed that the "social revolution" was making at least a little progress, even in this ultra-conservative of Mexican communities. There were a few die-hards on the sidelines. One "fine lady" looked on with considerable disapproval, as her daughter danced with the son of the town shoemaker. She remarked to me that the country and the younger generation were "slowly but surely going to the dogs." She could remember in her girlhood when attendance at a dance of this sort was by invitation only, and the invitations were based solely on the social acceptability of each person. Family background was the primary consideration in her day. She resented the fact that just because the shoemaker had expanded his shop into a little factory, and had built up an income more than most of the "better families" received from their dwindling estates, he felt that his children should be sent to the same private schools and attend the same dances as the children of families that could trace direct ancestry for hundreds of years back, in Spain. I refrained from reminding her that there was also Spanish blood in the shoemaker; and Indian ancestry, that probably went back to great chiefs of the country in which she was living.

I found my hosts, the Dows, and they were delighted that I had





been able to get back in time for the ball. Fred danced several dances with his wife and sister-in-law. Then a neighbor girl, of nineteen, asked him if her "Uncle Fred" wasn't going to have a dance with her. Out on the floor they spun, Fred stepping as lively as any of the boys. It was everybody's party, and age didn't matter a bit. I saw things working out the other way, too. One boy I knew came waltzing by with his own grandmother. She was enjoying it like a schoolgirl. That is one of the fine things I have noticed about dances in Sonora, even private ones in homes. The young folks seem to take great delight in getting the elder members of the family out on the floor, to teach them new steps. Perhaps that is the reason so many people in Alamos live to such a ripe old age.

Finally, the hour of twelve approached. A man stood at attention beside a Mexican flag, on the upper balcony; watch in hand, waiting for the exact second of midnight. The orchestra stopped, and men lined up on the dance floor in respectful silence; even the crowds in the street quieted down a little, as the hush spread. Slowly the man on the balcony raised his hand, and as he brought it down, someone fired a bunch of cannon crackers. The great assembly hall rang with shouts of "Viva Mexico." The sixteenth of September had officially arrived.

Then, several of the men started typical political speeches. They received about as much attention as a speech of the same sort would get from a similar crowd in the States. About a tenth of the lot were actually interested; the others had turned to friends, and were engaged in quiet conversation on the latest news and gossip. When this buzz of conversation became too noticeable, the chairman of the meeting would bang on the rail of the balcony with his cane, for attention, and they would quiet down again. I am sure the speakers enjoyed their own speeches very much, whether they listened to the others or not.

Everyone sighed a deep sigh of relief when it was over and the orchestra started up a lively tune. Couples whirled back onto the floor again, and the celebration of the sixteenth went into full swing. The same town orchestra played on until three in the morning, but we did not stay to see the end of the party.

It seemed hardly an hour before I was awakened by the sound

of that same orchestra. At first I thought it was the dance still going on, and that a change in the breeze had brought the music my way; but as I looked about I could see that it was already light and the music was coming from the alameda in front of the house. I walked to the balcony of my upstairs bedroom and looked out. The musicians were playing in the little bandstand. The cowboys of the countryside were riding round and round the alameda, many of them keeping their horses in step with the music. Some of the better-trained ponies were actually dancing in time, like circus or parade horses here in the States. Many of the riders carried bottles and, at that "ungodly time of the morning," were starting out on a "real drunk." They would stop and exchange drinks from each other's bottles, from time to time, and occasionally ride up to the bandstand and offer a drink to one of the musicians, who usually accepted—hardly missing a beat. My friend the coffin maker was still hard at it, slapping the big bass fiddle like a drum, and directing the orchestra with his chin. I marveled at his stamina. Once in a while, between tunes, he too tipped up the bottle of mescal, offered by one of the friendly vaqueros.

Easily the most outstanding character in the entire promenade was one old fellow on a very gaudily saddled horse. He had a flowing white beard and drooping mustachio. His horse was full of spirit and at times I would hold my breath for fear the rider would be thrown to the cobblestones by the gyrations of the beast. He was certainly too tipsy to have walked. Riding, however, was a different matter, and the old fellow managed to sway back into balance at the last possible split-second, and continue his riding and drinking. Each time he took the bottle from his lips he would give out with a lusty "viva" that would echo for blocks down the street. Everyone seemed to get a great "kick" out of his antics. Had he been dressed in the costume of a gaucho, rather than a Sonoran vaquero, he would have looked like one of the amusing pictures by my friend F. Molino Campos miraculously come to life. I am not too sure he was real. I suddenly realized that I ought to get out my sketchpad and do something quick, but in the few minutes I was gone from the balcony he had disappeared.

I went down to the street and asked several of the cowboys



where he had gone, and I got the same answer from each one: "He just vanished, Señor. One minute he was here, riding and shouting 'viva,' and the next he was gone." I kept on the lookout for the old fellow all day, but never caught sight of him or his horse again. The strangest part of the whole thing was that none of the dozens of well informed men I questioned had ever seen the old chap before, nor had they seen the buckskin mare with the white face. A Mexican cowboy might possibly forget a man's face, even one as striking as that of the old bewhiskered stranger, but to forget a horse was not to be even considered. Finally the cowboys quit their promenading and rode away in small groups. The orchestra stopped playing for a few minutes while they ate a large breakfast of coffee, beans and tripe, at a stall in front of the market. They still looked as fresh as daisies.

The lull was short. Young girls, dressed in their Sunday best, began to saunter into the plaza in laughing, chattering groups. The band started playing again, and the girls started walking round the plaza while workmen busily set up a temporary judge's stand and borrowed chairs from all the near-by houses, to furnish it. In a few more minutes, other riders came into the alameda plaza. They were not the professional vaqueros of the early morning, but rather the eligible young gentlemen of the town. They rode gallantly round the plaza—in the opposite direction to the girls—and bowed with mock ceremony at each group, as they passed. It was a gay sight. The sidewalks bordering the alameda were soon covered with chairs, taken from the houses behind them. Each household played host to a group of friends who had come to watch the games.

The first and main event actually stemmed from the old days of knights and ladies back in Spain. A dozen or so of the prettiest girls of the "good families of the town" had been chosen "queens." They sat on a specially raised dais, midway down the course. Directly over their heads was a stretched rope which extended from the house, back of them, to a tree in the plaza. Small bamboo tubes were wired to the rope, about four feet apart, and through each of these tubes was drawn a bright-colored ribbon. These ribbons corresponded in color with the larger ones worn by each queen. From each ribbon hung a dangling brass ring of about an

inch and a quarter inside diameter. Each rider was given a small wooden lance; and the idea of the game was to "spear" the ring on the bottom of the ribbon corresponding to the color worn by the rider's favorite. The horseman who presented his queen with the most ribbons could claim her for a partner in the fancy-dress ball, that night, and the girl presented with the most ribbons would lead the dress parade, as queen of the fiesta.

When they told me the idea of the game, I could hardly believe that a man riding full speed on a horse would be able to spear such a tiny ring—much less, choose which one he wanted. The game started after each rider was given a trial run, to get used to the height of the rings. To my surprise, two of the riders caught ribbons on their lances the first time, but they had to put them back. The boys dashed down on their targets like a cavalry charge, several at a time, each straining to capture the ribbon of his "lady fair." There seemed to be few rules, except that each contestant was limited to ten tries. Sometimes they charged singly, and sometimes several abreast, each after a different ribbon. The judges would not allow two contestants, trying for the same ribbon, to ride at the same time; for this encouraged too many rough tricks. It was a colorful and dashing spectacle. The spectators cheered like rooters at a football game, and the girls demurely sat and received ribbons from their gallant knights. After a ribbon was captured, the attendants hastily placed another through the bamboo tube, before the next charge. Alicia Palomares received the most ribbons, and it was understandable. She would have made a fitting queen for any pageant in any land I have ever visited.

The next game was a little rougher, and was not participated in by some of the players of the first game. Some of the vaqueros from the ranches who, because of family standing, had been barred from contesting in the more gallant jousts, were entered in the "rooster pulling." I fear that the S.P.C.A. would hardly approve of this; for, no matter who the winner may be, it is always the rooster who is the loser. A fighting cock was brought into the street, to the accompaniment of tremendous cheers, and a bag of silver was tied to one of its feet. The orchestra, which had been silent while the other game was in progress, struck up a martial air while the

attendants buried the rooster in a dusty spot in the street, where a few cobblestones were missing. The tough old boy put up quite a battle, but he was finally submerged in dust with nothing but his head and scrawny neck protruding. The contestants drew lots for positions in the single file that formed at the far end of the street. When this was done, a pistol shot set them off toward the poor old rooster. He was not so easy to catch, as might be expected. A rider had to lean far down, with his hand outstretched, and try to grasp the rooster around the neck. In this unbalanced position, every movement of the horse detracted from accuracy of aim and, to top it off, the rooster was very good at dodging. The whole field of contestants roared by, three times, before one of them snatched the old fellow out of the ground and rode off in a cloud of dust. All the rest followed in mad pursuit in an attempt to take the bag of coins away from him, or spill them on the ground. The winner, according to time-honored custom, used the hapless rooster as a weapon to beat off his pursuers. When they returned, everyone was dusty and blood-spattered; and the rooster, a limp unrecognizable thing, was still held firmly by the neck, in the hand of the victor. I liked the first game better; but then, I know good people in Alamos who consider boxing and football disgustingly cruel, particularly when the thing is done for big money.

The band played again, and everyone had request numbers. Nobody seemed to consider that these fellows might be getting tired by now. Suddenly one of the few cars in the town honked its way through the crowd and came to a stop in front of me. In the back seat was Polo Acosta, the son of the new Presidente. He had come to take me to a very special lunch. I got in with him, and wondered what was going to happen next. We stopped in front of the biggest cantina in town, which had been reserved for the occasion. A long table had been set in the middle of the room, and around it sat the principal business men of Alamos and some of the largest ranch owners from the district. There was an empty space between the incoming and outgoing "presidentes," and I was led to this place of honor. I could hardly believe my eyes! They informed me that these were trying times, and that they wanted the United States to know how friendly they felt. Since I was the only

actual resident of that country now in Alamos, they had invited me as a sort of "unofficial ambassador." The room was blue with stucco, and full of a confusion of voices. Drinks were already being served, and continued to arrive with an alarming regularity, all through the lunch and the speeches that followed. Each speech was more flowery than the last and each speaker made mention of the friendly relations which exist between Mexico and her neighbor to the north. Such friendly remarks were invariably followed by a chorus of "Viva Estados Unidos," and a good deal of back-slapping from everyone, who could reach my back, to get in a lick. By the time the affair was over, I knew that someone had slapped my back. I was a little sore the next day, but this did not detract a bit from my appreciation of the gestures.

Somewhere during the proceedings (I am told), I rose "majestically" to my feet, and delivered a oration, in Spanish, on the joys and advantages of inter-American solidarity. A truthful friend, who was under doctor's orders not to drink—hence a good judge of the matter—assured me that the episode was a howling success. I had "cribbed" every catch phrase and high-sounding expression from all the other speeches, and threw them back at them in one long wordy blast. It will be one of the lasting regrets of my life that no recording was made of that oration. It must have been a "honey."

All I remember about leaving the place is the fact that the town band, including my friend the coffin maker, had dropped in and was rendering loud blasts of music for all and sundry. That gang could sure "take it."

I must have been pretty full of the spirit of international good will, or something. At any rate, Mrs. Dow smelled my breath and ordered me to take a cold shower. This she followed with a large bowl of steaming beef broth, and another order to go to bed and try to get myself in shape to attend the Governor's ball, that night. I don't know what I would have done without her kind but firm ministrations. Her formula worked, for I awoke a few hours later, refreshed and ready for anything. Fresh white clothes were laid out for me to wear to the dance that evening, and I felt like a new man—after another shower and a change to the new outfit.

General Macias, the Governor of the state, was present at the

ball that night, and spent most of the evening talking quietly with one or another of his friends. He led the dress parade, with the pretty queen of the day, and danced a few times with some of the ladies. I was introduced to him, and was impressed by his cordial attitude and firm handshake. We sat and talked for some time. Mostly, he asked polite questions about my work and my feelings about the country, and I answered. He said that he had heard of me and that I was "muy simpático" toward the people of his state. I wondered if somebody had been telling him of my "speech" of the afternoon, and shuddered.

The same band played for all the dances, and kept it up till another three A.M. had rolled around. Toward the end, the fiddler looked as if he was playing in his sleep and my friend the leader quit conducting and just gave them the reins. It was all he could do to steady himself against the bass fiddle and keep slapping.

The costumes of the girls were beautiful. Most Sonoran girls are excellent seamstresses, and nearly all of the outfits had been made by the wearers. They held a vote on the most outstanding, and Polo's fifteen-year-old sister won. She appeared at the ball, dressed as a simple peasant girl going to market. She carried a basket of colorful fruit, balanced on her head, and a green parrot perched on her left shoulder. To top off the effect, she led a freshly scrubbed baby white pig on a pink ribbon. I was certainly sorry there was no more color film or flash bulbs in my camera kit.

Two days later I began to wonder about the coffin maker-carpenter-musician that I had hired to make picture frames. He hadn't showed up, as he had promised. At last I decided to go to his house and see whether the poor fellow was sick. His wife met me at the door, and informed me that her husband was still sleeping, but that she would go and wake him up.

"The sixteenth of September is always like this," she explained. "Now it is very much sleep that he must take, to make up for his loss. But it is worth it. Is it not, Señor?"

I agreed that it was worth it, many times over, and asked her under no circumstances to awaken her husband until he had caught up on his sleep. My picture frames could very well wait.

## *Joaquin Serenades His Aunt*

STREET musicians, from Sonora, sprinkle my sketchpads. They offer a never-ending temptation to visiting artists. Nothing seems so typical of the west coast as musicians in the street, be it a large city or a village of two dozen houses in the mountains. My sketches remind me of many things, and bring back countless happy memories, but above all, I am reminded of the time we serenaded the aunt of my friend, Joaquin.

He stopped by, one evening, with a couple of friends—one carrying a guitar and the other a flute. They informed me that this was his aunt's saint's day, and I would be "muy simpático" if I were to bring my guitar and help serenade her.

This seemed like a fine idea, so off we went—two guitars and a flute. In a few blocks we came to the cantina, where we stopped and had several "Three Star Hennessys"—to loosen up the vocal cords. They worked to perfection. In a few minutes we were rehearsing—right there in the bar. This drew quite a crowd—and a couple more recruits, including a tenor, and a violinist who had only three strings, but played really well.

Joaquin decided that we had better take a little refreshment along, so we left after a couple more drinks, with a full bottle of "Three Star," just in case the vocal cords should happen to get parched.

According to an old statute on the law books of Alamos, it was necessary to go to the police station and register the fact that we were serenading. This kept us from being arrested for disturbing the peace. The chief of police reminded us that it was legal for us to sing, all we wanted, since we were out on a "seranata"; but we must refrain from loud talking in the streets.







We passed by Adolfo's place, and someone suggested that we ask him to come along, too, since he was a distinguished musician. Someone else reminded us of the fact that it was a piano he played, and a very heavy grand, at that. (Not much good on a serenade.)

"Bring him along anyway," said Joaquin; "he can sing, at least."

Adolfo came to the door about then, and assured us that singing was one thing that he could not do. "Who ever heard of a Mexican who couldn't sing," expostulated one of the crowd. "Give him a few drinks—he'll sing. This brandy would make the wooden saints in the Church go on a serenade."

Having acquired Adolfo, who still insisted he couldn't sing—after the third drink, we remembered that we were very close to Louisa's house; and she ought to be serenaded—for the "hell" of it. Louisa was a very pretty girl. We were in the middle of the first tune, when Alesandro came round the corner of the house—mad as a hatter. He had been "playing bear" at the iron grill of Louisa's window, and thought that a rival was serenading his sweetheart. Explanations, and a drink, pacified him; so we all serenaded Louisa while we waited for a boy to bring another bottle of brandy. Our troupe had swelled to about a dozen, by now; and we were beginning to get into the feel of the thing.

It was only a few doors down the street to Polo's house. He was the son of the President—a very good singer and fine fellow. Nothing seemed more natural than to serenade the family of the President, especially, since he too had a good-looking daughter. Explanations were always made at each stop that this was really a serenade for Joaquin's aunt, and that we were just rehearsing. On the second song, Polo and his father, the President of the district, came out under the portales. They were both beaming, "El Presidente" passed around cigarettes. Polo found a bottle of tequila. It took little urging to get him to accompany us. He even had an idea:

"Why not get Pablo, the bass fiddler? After all, what is a seranata without a bass?" So, off we trooped to Pablo's house, stopping several times along the way, to do a number under the window of some friend. Pablo was willing; but his wife reminded him that he had a coffin to finish on the morrow. (He was the same coffin

maker, bass viol player, and orchestra leader.) There ensued quite a family row, which was enjoyed by everyone but Pablo. They finally compromised, deciding that Pablo could come outside and have a drink with us and serenade the Palomare sisters, who lived in the same block. After the third drink, when a safe distance had intervened between Pablo and his wife, he again became the dominant male and, asserting his rights, accompanied us for the rest of the night. He knew his wife would not dare to venture out on the streets to catch up with him, at that hour.

As the crowd increased, the suggestions as to who should be serenaded, along the way, piled up—until we were doing an average of two per block. It was all good fun, and I had a chance to learn the words to several songs that I wanted; songs mostly of unrequited love, deserted sweethearts, and deeds of bravery: “Borachita Me Voy,” “Mi Ranchito,” “Una Mujer Casada,” “La Noche de Amor.” Translated into English, they seem either silly or slightly bawdy, but in Spanish, under a Mexican moon, they were the essence of poetry.

Lights were going out, one by one, in the houses along the streets; but we knew that we had a considerable audience. We were pretty good, if I do say so myself. In spite of the quantity of brandy consumed, there were no drunks in the crowd, and the instruments and voices stayed in tune much better than might be expected.

We had three boys bringing drinks, by then, and someone said it would be fine if we could have some tacos and coffee. Another celebrant reminded the first that it was eleven o'clock, and all the restaurants were closed.

“In the next block is the Indian enchiladera called Chavella. She will open up to such a company.”

“Do you know her?” another asked.

“Do I know her? Indeed!” he cried. “Is it not to her that I pay the ten pesos, every month, for my ‘broncho’ by her daughter, Marguerita? I assure you, compadres, that I know her, and all can be arranged to the utmost satisfaction. Furthermore, we should have to sing for Marguerita, sooner or later; since she will find out that I was out this night, and will feel slighted if songs are not played under her window.”

When we came to the house, he pounded on the front door for entry, while we assembled under the window he indicated, and did our best to serenade "La India." A lamp was lighted, and soon smells of firewood and brewing coffee came out into the street. We played again, inside the house, while Chavella actually made enchiladas at that hour as if nothing were irregular about the matter.

Marguerita came smiling into the room, and by her looks, I decided that our friend would soon be paying her mother twenty pesos.

About then, one of the boys who was maintaining our lifeline with the cantina arrived—empty-handed—to announce that there was no more "Three Star Hennessy" to be had, but other brands were still available; also, the bar was closing, but the back door would be unlocked so the boys could continue to supply us, if we so wished.

No one seemed to think of what seemed the obvious thing, to me, and I certainly was not going to say anything. I am sure that if I had announced that the American way would be to have one boy bring several bottles, instead of a bottle each for several boys, they would have been shocked by my attitude. They could send, now, and purchase the night's supply, so the bartender could go to sleep; but that would not be the Mexican system—and I was in Mexico. I kept silent. We finally took our leave of the Indian family, all of whom had awakened, one by one, including our friend's little "broncho." He greeted the boy with a great deal of affection, and not a trace of embarrassment. Illegitimacy of this sort, by unmarried boys of "good family," is thought little of, so long as it is admitted and the father pays something toward the support of the offspring.

"Otherwise," explained one of my friends, "how can Mexico become a racially unified nation? You don't expect him to marry the Indian, do you?"

We finally arrived at the home of Joaquin's aunt—at one-thirty in the morning. We gathered under the window, and started playing, softly, her favorite tune, "La Estrellita."

"This will please her so very much," sighed Joaquin, "she loves

so the music." Then we struck up a livelier tune, but still there was no response from the house. Joaquin looked a little puzzled, but we rendered two more numbers before he suddenly stopped us.

"Compadres! A thousand pardons! I am a stupid pig! I have just now remembered that my so dear aunt is quite deaf. She cannot hear a single note, without the aid of the ear trumpet. A little moment of patience, please, while I awaken the servants who will inform her that she is being serenaded."

The "little moment" stretched into a good many, as they are apt to do in Mexico; but finally, after considerable banging on the front gate, a servant was summoned and the old lady was properly notified of the fact that she was being serenaded. She was moved close to the window with her ear trumpet in place, and at a signal, everyone began again "La Estrellita."

"Play louder, Compadres," shouted Joaquin. "Even this will seem very gentle music to her ears."

Everyone redoubled his efforts. They had lighted a lamp in the aunt's room, and I could see by her face that she was enjoying the performance. I looked about me in the moon-drenched street at the white-clad, white-hatted singing figures, casting weird shadows on the dull-red paving tiles; and I wondered if people in the United States really knew how much they were missing. Suddenly I saw a thing that startled me. There was Adolfo—with his mouth wide open and head thrown back toward the stars. He was singing at the top of his voice. The boys had been right.

I thought things were going along very nicely, but Joaquin seemed to think that his aunt still needed more volume, and suggested that we group nearer the window. The window was high above the street, however, and when we got too close, the wall muffled the sound. Finally, Pablo the bass player raised his hand for silence. "Señores, with your permission, I have the suggestion. What this orchestra needs—to make sufficient volume for the lady—is brass; and only three blocks from here lives my first cornetist, José, who is doubtless wondering why he has not been invited to this fine serenade."

Joaquin immediately sent a messenger, and in a short time our ranks and volume were swelled by a first-class triple-tongued cor-

netist, who brought a smile of real appreciation to the face of the dear aunt. The serenade was a success. We went through our entire repertoire again, much to the satisfaction of everyone, except possibly the police chief, who had given us permission to serenade. I rather doubt if he realized the proportions it was eventually to reach. The crowd had increased by then, and so had the distance from the cantina. It was necessary to have five boys fetching brandy.

Finally we began to wander back toward the center of town, serenading without favor or prejudice at each street corner, as we traveled; but I was beginning to get sleepy. Everyone seemed to have forgotten that we were no longer entertaining the deaf aunt. I saw a good chance, and knowing I could never explain my departure, I simply dodged around a corner and struck for home.

The music continued in the distance, and sounded sweeter the farther I got from it. Evidently they had not missed me, and I was sure that they did not need me; the music carried nicely to any quarter of the town.

The moon was low, now, and the palms and poinciana trees cast lacy shadows on the stucco walls. My footsteps echoed, hollowly, in the empty streets. The scent of gardenias came from flowered patios, and a caged nightingale burst into answering song to the dimming serenade. Somewhere a rooster crowed, and a light breeze rustled in the great, arching, wild fig trees, in front of my house. It had been a wonderful night, and my bed would feel mighty good.

I had just dozed off to a jumbled dream where I was playing a bass fiddle, directly into the ear trumpet of a perfectly beautiful Señorita, when it happened—faintly, at first, with muted violin and humming voices—the strains of “Las Mañanitas,” that hymn to the “little morning” without which no Sonora serenade is complete. Then came the voices, singing the words:

Estas son las mañanitas,  
que cantaba El Rey David,  
a las muchachas bonitas,  
se las cantamos así.

The refrain came a little faster, but still chanted like a hymn:

Despierta mi bien despierta,  
mira que ya amanecio,  
ya los pajarillos cantan,  
la luna ya se metio.

Finally came the bass viol and even the cornet, but muted with the player's hat. This was not a song to be blared. My friends had not forgotten me. I came to the window. A faint light showed to the east.

"My friend," greeted Joaquin, "why did you leave so early? Was it, perhaps, the too much brandy?"

I was in a spot. I couldn't admit I was too sleepy. The brandy, although plentiful, had not bothered me, for it was drunk from a bottle, passed around; and a man could take as little as he liked, so long as he lifted it to his lips. I had to think fast. Then, suddenly, I struck the right answer.

"It is not my custom," I replied, "to sing after the first cock crows, in the morning."

"A superstition perhaps?"

"Yes, possibly."

"Then all is explained; have but one drink with us, and we shall go to our beds."

They passed the bottle through the wrought iron grating of my window. It was good brandy.

The next day I found that the serenade was a subject of polite casual conversation, in the plaza and market place.

"Did you hear the music in the night, Maria?"

"Si, como no. Que bonita."

"Yes, it was very pretty. They were serenading Joaquin's aunt; they tell me, even the Gringo helped."







## *The Funeral That Came too Late*

THE sketch of a Mexican graveyard reminds me of a tale told me by an American friend, who for obvious reasons asked that his name be withheld. It seems that Joe —— was a sort of black sheep in an otherwise spotless and wealthy family of sisters, who resided in rather dignified grandeur in one of our larger east coast cities. Joe was the only fly in their ointment. He would show up at the most inopportune times, and cause no end of embarrassment; for Joe drank, and usually did a bang-up job of it. The sisters encouraged their wayward brother to travel, after giving up all the cures known to science, religion and witchcraft, in those days.

This at least kept him out of sight most of the time. When he finally wrote from the west coast of Mexico, and stated that he had at last found the spot that suited him perfectly, they sighed a deep sigh of relief. They sent him a substantial check which they promised to repeat monthly, if he would but stay in this chosen paradise of his, and never bother them again.

All went well with Joe for some time. He had plenty of money, and was an all round good fellow. He spent it generously, and soon had acquired a host of friends, a small ranch conveniently near town, and a good-looking housekeeper who soon learned to be both mother and mistress to him, depending upon the occasion. All in all, Joe was living what seemed to him the perfect life, when the terrible thing happened. He started to get out of bed, one morning about ten o'clock; and there on the floor were snakes, dozens of them, every color of the rainbow. They did not let up, and Joe had one of the "dandiest" cases of delirium tremens that anyone in the community had ever witnessed. This distressed Joe's

friends no end. They finally, after consulting with the housekeeper-mother-mistress, decided that he should be shipped at once to a sanitarium in the States where, with proper care, he might snap out of it. Joe seemed willing; shelled out a good size roll of bills for tickets, and told them to keep the change for a farewell party.

The party was literally a howling success—so perfect in fact, that there must have been fifty of Joe's closest friends to see him hilariously off on the train. Joe had "gone on the wagon," and was the only sober member of the assemblage; but the snakes were still pretty thick, and he failed to note, until he pulled into the large town to the south, that he was on the wrong train. He got off and, while waiting for the next train north, seemed to have decided to drown his disappointment in the flowing cup.

The local doctor had told him and his friends that another spree would be his last; and he was right. His contrite friends took the body off the train, and buried it as quietly as they could, for they were not particularly proud of their part in what had happened.

It was about a week later that my friend who told me this tale happened to think that, after all, Joe had relatives who should be notified. They went out to his ranch. The lady of the house had disappeared with everything remotely negotiable; but some of his papers were in a bureau drawer, and among them the sisters' address. They sat down in the nearest bar, and penned what must have been a masterpiece of condolence, assuring the sisters that the entire city was in mourning for their beloved friend. They purposely failed to include the exact date of his death, and hoped that this kind letter would clear up the whole matter.

In this they were mistaken, however. They received a wire, and three hundred dollars in telegraphed money, instructing them to be sure that Joe had a very good funeral, according to the best established custom of the area.

Here, indeed, was a puzzler, for there had not even been an undertaker called in. They couldn't dig him up and bury him again; the weather was too hot; so they called a meeting of the clan.

The peso was five and a half to one in those days, and it bought as much as a dollar did in the States. The outcome of the meeting was that on the morrow the "committee" announced that there

would be a fiesta of sorts held out near the graveyard, under the shade trees, along the arroyo; that there would be free beer and ears for all comers.

The crowd was a dandy. A fine time was had by all. As the sun began to throw long shadows, someone in the committee suddenly remembered the occasion, and got the assembly in a ragged line behind a wagon drawn by two black horses, bearing a box draped in black and decorated with wilted flowers. Everyone looked his saddest, while the village photographer dived under his black cloth and snapped the funeral parade, at the gates of the graveyard. The sisters were edified; the crowd had a good time, and I am sure that Joe couldn't have dreamed up a better funeral, if he had planned it himself.

## *Decorations on a Mexican Bridle*

IN MY travels through Sonora I have seldom met people who were downright unpleasant; certainly, no more than I would have met traveling the same time and distance through my own country.

The sketch of a pony standing outside of a cantina reminds me of one of those few instances, and how the unpleasant person finally decided to make an exception and become a friend, even though I was a Gringo.

It happened in the little town of Imuris, near the border. I came in late at night, and the only light burning was in a small cantina. I had camping equipment, but I was hungry and did not care to unpack and cook a meal at that time of night. The smell of frying *tortillas* told me that there was a taco maker in the place, so I entered.

A few of the men looked up, when I came in, and greeted me with friendly smiles. I ordered a beer, and went over to the end of the room, where a large fat woman was making tacos. I was just placing my order when a tall, raw-boned Mexican cowboy, at the other end of the room, apparently noticed the Yankee twang to my Spanish. He seemed to resent my presence.

"You don't have to feed that damned Gringo, if you don't want to," he called in English, for my benefit. "The law says that you can refuse service to anyone."

I finished placing my order and walked over to where he was sitting.

"You wanta fight?" he asked.

"No, I don't want to fight; I want to find out why you don't like us Gringos, as you call us. I like Mexicans, and most of the

people in my country do; but sometimes I hear my people call a Mexican a 'Greaser,' and I am ashamed, just as most good Mexicans would be ashamed if they heard you talking."

"So, you do want to fight after all."

"No, I only want to find out something."

"You'll find out something. I can lick any God-damned Gringo in the world."

"That would only prove that you hate my people. I still would not know why. I really want to know. I am a writer; and I would like to tell the people in my country why you do not like us."

"Don't listen to him, Señor," said the bartender. "He is muy boracho" (very drunk), "and does not know what he is saying. If you want, I will have him thrown out. This is a respectable place."

"But I want to listen," I replied. "One of your own proverbs says that borachos, and children, are most likely to tell the truth."

There were smiles of approval along the bar, and the cowboy accepted the drink I had ordered for him.

"Bueno pues, I shall tell this man why I do not like the Gringos. I think I have been mistaken. I do not believe that he is 'pure Gringo,' or he would fight rather than discuss, but I will wager that he would not dare write what I am about to tell. If he did, the periódicos of his country would refuse to print it. First, regard what I have here in my pocket."

He took out an American dollar and a Mexican peso.

"Feel the weight of these two coins, Señor (I shall not call you a Gringo). The coin from your country is a little heavier, but for that coin I can buy five pesos and twenty centavos. I work longer and harder for a peso than a cowboy in your country does for the dollar. I ask, is that just?"

I tried, patiently, to explain why the price of the peso was low; the matter of comparative imports and exports; how, if Mexico were producing more that could be purchased by other countries, the peso would go up. I cited the case of some of the Central American countries.

"But how can we produce without capital?" he cried, "and capitalists from the United States will try to ruin our country. You

argue, Señor, with words and figures; while my sentiments come from the heart, and my own experience. It is a deeper matter than the money; come outside and I will show you something."

I have to admit that I was a little hesitant about going outside with this chap. By now, he had consumed the second drink I had bought him. He was tipsy enough for a hard push to have toppled him over; but a fight of any kind, under these conditions, would have ended in plenty of trouble for me.

He led me out in front of the cantina, and up to his horse, tethered to a hitching rail.

"I ask you, Señor, to look closely at that bridle, and possibly you will gather another reason for my dislike of the Gringo."

There, glittering in the moonlight, was a rather ornate silver bridle; which, on closer inspection, proved to be decorated profusely with the highly polished insignia and buttons of U.S. army uniforms.

"I was only a young lad at that time, Señor, but large for my age. I killed all of those soldiers, and it gave me pleasure to watch them die. I did not kill for patriotism; I killed for a stronger reason—revenge! They came to my country, they said, to hunt Pancho Villa. Actually, they wanted an excuse to take more of our Mexico; like they did in California and Texas, and tried in Baja California. But that, Señor, was not the real reason that I joined up with Villa, to kill.

"They came with Negro troops to my village. Villa wasn't there; nor had he been there. Everyone told them that. They raided the cantinas and, when these Negroes were full of our liquor, they set about to burn houses, killing men and mistreating women, like wild savages. They came to our house, and demanded that my mother and two sisters tell them the whereabouts of Pancho Villa. They naturally didn't know, and wouldn't have told if they had known. The soldiers were very drunk. They mistreated the women terribly. They took my fifteen-year-old sister, stripped off her clothes, and dragged her into the street where a big black soldier raped her, with four others holding her down. It was her screams that brought my father from the field. He told me to hold the horses, while he ran into the village to see what was wrong. He







rushed the men with his machete, when he saw what was happening; and several other villagers followed in the charge, but they were all shot down.

"When I heard the shooting and saw smoke coming from the village, I tried to bring in the horses, but it was a terrible job. They kept balking. Finally, when I got them into the village, the black troops had left. My father lay dead in the street where they had shot him. Mother sat in the dust, beside him, with his head in her lap. There was blood all over her dress. She did not weep; she would not talk. She was never the same. There had been a big rain in the mountains, and the streams were flooded. I asked for my sisters, and the villagers pointed to the raging, muddy arroyo. They had thrown themselves in, and no one had tried to stop them. We never recovered the bodies. Do you blame, me, Señor, for joining up with Villa, and killing Gringo soldiers? Do you blame me for hating your people?"

"No," I answered, "I cannot blame you. That was a terrible thing. I find it hard to believe that it could have happened. Where were their officers, all this time?"

"That, Señor, was discussed later in the village. No one remembers seeing any officers. Later, American troops with officers came and explained that it was an unauthorized raid by a gang of soldiers who had separated from their outfit during another fight; but that did not repair the damage."

We went back into the bar, and I bought a couple more drinks of mescal.

"Salud," he said, as he raised his glass, "war at its best is terrible, and now more comes. I hope that it does not reach Mexico. Even Villa's troops did terrible things when they raided the haciendas of landowners, who opposed him; but one hates those who have harmed him, and forgets the wrongs done to others."

"Buen provecho," I answered raising my glass. "I, too, hope that war does not come to your land; nor mine. It has spread over enough of the world. My country will do its best to keep it out of this hemisphere. I promise, when I return, to write your story; and if it is ever published, I shall send you a copy. American publishers are very broadminded, and sometimes print things about their own

country that are far from complimentary, if they feel that it is the truth."

"Ah, then, Señor, I will tell you another story to print. It may put a little laughter into your writings. There must be always a little of the sweet to go with the sour, if you are to write a good story.

"As I said before, I joined the army of Pancho Villa when but a boy. But age had little to do with such things—I could ride a horse and carry a rifle. I walked a hundred miles to find Villa, and when I told him that, he said I was a fool. He asked why I hadn't stolen a horse. This came to me as a new idea. He explained that since this was a war, it would not be stealing in the sense that I would have to confess a crime to a priest; the revolution needed horses. He turned me over to another young fellow, a year older than myself, who had been in the army three months. This young hombre had been most successful in supplying horses; in fact, the General himself rode horses that he had brought. He promised to show me how it was done, and the next time we came close to a town, we mounted two of the worst nags in camp, and rode out for replacements.

" 'We will look for the cantina with the brightest lights in the windows, and the most noise,' he said. 'Then I will show you what to do.' It was a very dark night, and no one noticed us, as we rode into town. We had no rifles or uniforms of any sort, to betray us as soldiers. No one paid any attention, when we stopped in front of the noisiest cantina in town. The place was crowded. The horses, tied outside, all looked very good. We untied three, apiece, as quietly as possible; climbed on a new mount, and rode out of town, leading the others. It was as easy as that, Señor; and it worked every time—but once.

"About a year later, the same compadre and I were again short of horses. There had been some fighting, and several had been shot. In a war, in this country, more horses than men are killed.

"We rode quietly into a small village about ten miles from camp, and were looking the situation over, when we heard a shot down the street. We knew that there would be no time to get several horses. Soon the streets would be full of people. The cantina,

where we had stopped, was especially noisy; so we took the two horses that seemed the best to us in the dark, and rode as fast as we could, out of town. When we were about halfway back to camp, the moon came up, and my friend suggested that we stop and roll a cigarette, and rest a moment. Suddenly, he stopped in front of my horse.

“‘Compadre!’ he cried. ‘We are ruined! Regard! Do you not recognize the horse? See the two white feet, and the fine-shaped head with the white star in the forehead. That is Pancho Villa’s own personal mount; the one he took from the wealthy haciendado only last month. And the saddle. Ojalá! We must fly for our lives.’

“And that, Señor, was how I left the army of Pancho Villa. I still liked the General. I worship his memory; but Villa was never very good at listening to explanations. Pues, what else could a man do, but ride over the mountain?”

## *La Huera Pistola*

*H*AD it not been for car trouble, I never would have seen the pistol-packing blonde "La Huera Pistola," or met the blacksmith and his family, or painted a picture of chili peppers drying in the sun.

It was in northern Sonora, and I was on my way to the border, after a stay of over five months in the back country. With luck, I would have made Nogales in a few more hours. Visions of ice-cream sodas, porterhouse steaks, and apple pie were already sharp in my mind. I was even planning a breakfast of waffles and ham and eggs at Mrs. Levi's Border Café, when it happened.

All of a sudden, steam began to pour out of my radiator, and I stopped, to find that my engine was almost burning up. I always carry at least ten gallons of spare water on any desert trip, so I filled the radiator, but I could see that there was no hope of my traveling far. A stream of water, as big as my finger, was spurting out from between the rear of the engine and the clutch. The truck limped into the next town with its water gone, steaming like a Yellowstone geyser. The only place to get any work done seemed to be the small blacksmith shop, so I turned off the engine and, hoping it wouldn't blow up, walked in. The blacksmith was a huge fellow with an infectious smile. He told me that he had worked, once, for an auto mechanic in Bisbee, Arizona; and that he had a few tools, but very little time.

He explained that this was the fall plowing season, and that his customers depended upon him for his services. If plows were not sharpened, crops would not-get in, and there would be no money

to pay bills. He took his responsibility to his community very seriously. There were no other blacksmiths within a radius of thirty miles—a very busy man.

On the other hand, he was genuinely concerned with my problem; and willing to help, provided he could make me see his viewpoint. Plows took priority over my car, which he could fix if I had patience to wait; but I was made to understand that, when a farmer came in with work, he would have to drop what he was doing, and get the farmer back into his field.

Although I was really anxious to get to the border, I could see his point of view, and could not help admiring him for it. If this had been my first trip into the country I would have fumed and fretted, and offered to pay double the price to get my work done first; but if Sonora has taught me nothing else, it has taught me patience.

There was nothing for me to do but put myself at his mercy, and I have never regretted it. He looked at the car, and said that an expansion plug had rusted out of the engine block. It would be necessary to remove the engine and the clutch, to put another in. Whoever designed the motor was so afraid it would freeze and crack that they put thin metal plugs in the block, to take care of the expansion. I have no quarrel with them on that score, but why one should have been located in such an inaccessible spot, and made of thin, easily rusted material, is something I would rather not discuss in print. A rustproof plug would certainly cost only a few cents more, I am sure.

There was no hotel or restaurant in town, but the blacksmith said I could put my bed up in a corner of his shop, and eat with his family. I met his plump, smiling wife and seventeen-year-old daughter, who had learned to speak very good English when they lived in Bisbee. They welcomed me into the family with the matter-of-fact hospitality so common in the unspoiled sections of Mexico. While the blacksmith finished up his orders, I unloaded the truck and made myself at home.

Antonita, the daughter, helped and watched. She liked the twenty paintings and the botanic specimens, but the live reptiles almost sent her into hysterics. In fact, she made me lock them up

in a tool shed away from everything else, before she would come back out of the house. She and her mother insisted that the paintings be placed in the front room, where they would be safe. In a short while, I found that they were staging an art show for their neighbors.

They set the pictures up all round the walls of the front room, and a steady stream of neighbors began to file through the house to look. They had not intended the thing to get so far out of hand, and asked me if I minded. I assured them that I had painted the pictures to be looked at, and was flattered by the interest of the community. It was my first one-man show in Mexico, and, from the standpoint of interest and appreciation, I believe it was the most successful I have had in any country.

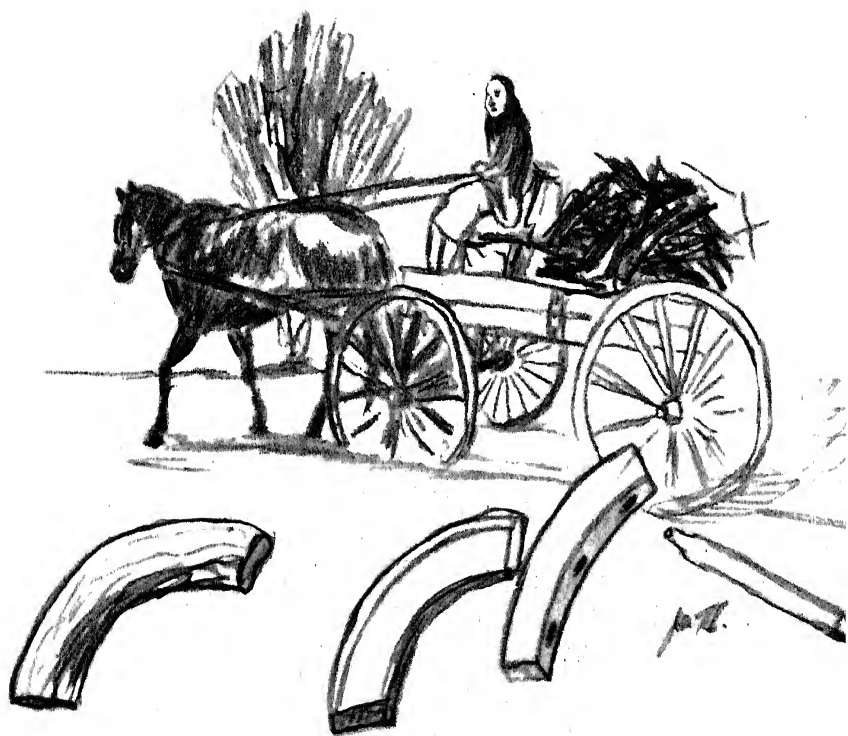
The supper that night was so good that I could almost forget the porterhouse steak waiting for me at the border. I got out my kodachrome projector and a bunch of color stills. After supper, with the projector hooked up to an auto battery, I put on a show for my hosts, and a roomful of neighbors. The wonder of color photography had never come their way, and it was a real pleasure to see their reactions.

The next day I helped swing the engine out of the car on a block and tackle but, before the blacksmith could get to work on it, the farmers with dull plows began to appear, and mechanical work was suspended.

I was pacing up and down the shop, trying not to become too impatient with proceedings, when Antonita came in. She had a suggestion.

"Yesterday," she said, "when you unpacked your paintings, I noticed that there was one bare canvas. It will probably be several days before you can go. Why not paint another picture? It seems a shame to take a bare canvas back to the States, and I can show you a subject which you haven't touched."

I had no notion what she had in mind, but the idea seemed a good one; so I walked down the road with her, carrying my paint box and canvas; while she brought the easel. We had gone perhaps half a mile when we topped a hill, and there was a small adobe farmhouse, with chili peppers drying in strings on the walls. In the







yard, several women and girls sat around mats covered with chilies, stringing them.

"There," she said, "don't you think you should have that picture in your collection?"

I was amazed by her understanding of what made up a pictorial subject. Most girls her age would have suggested a flowerbed in the Plaza, or coyly intimated that they would be willing to pose in a China Poblana costume. I went right to work. After that, time didn't matter. I had a swell subject and a pleasant companion who was interested in, and understood instinctively, what I was doing.

I worked very rapidly with a palette knife and, by the time the sun was low, we trudged back to the blacksmith shop with a picture pretty well laid out. It seemed like a miracle to the blacksmith and his wife, who thought a painting must take months to do.

A very old and bony horse was tethered in the back yard that night. My host informed me that he had to make a wheel for a wagon on the morrow, so there would be no work done on the car. I didn't mind now. I had gotten over being in a hurry.

That night at the supper table, the blacksmith told me the story of the old woman who owned the horse. She was known for many miles around as "La Huera Pistola," because she always carried a Colt forty-five on her hip.

It seems that this woman, who is known as the "Pistol Blonde," had been the wife of a very well known freighter in the early days. Her husband had been killed in a holdup, while transporting silver bullion from a mine in the hills. She had strapped on his pistol, and had taken over the freight business.

Learning to use the gun by practicing regularly every day, her fame as a marksman (or is it markswoman?) soon spread through the land. She was never molested by robbers or bandits, regardless of the value of her loads, and always insisted on driving the first wagon in the train. No man in her employ could ever equal her in getting a stubborn four-mule team over a steep hill, or through deep mud. She did very well for some years in the community, until the railroad and trucks came along.

Now, she was reduced to the one bony nag I saw in the back yard, and a rickety wagon, with which she eked out a living hauling firewood.

"I must make her another wheel in the morning, Señor," said my friend. "She makes barely enough to live on each day and, every day her wagon is idle, she may be hungry. Anyway, you will have to finish your painting before you can leave."

The next morning I became so interested in the manufacture of a wheel that I forgot about the painting, until Antonita reminded me. The wheel had been broken on a large rock, and now the blacksmith must fashion a new metal rim, two wooden sections of wheel, and several spokes. He had the local carpenter to help him, and the latter had brought along an elbow-shaped branch of tough mesquite, that had been cut and cured for this purpose.

I watched them saw this branch lengthwise into two thick, crooked-edged boards, the width of the wheel. Then they laid out, on each board, a penciled pattern of the wheel section to be made. The blacksmith started hewing to this pencil line with a small, very sharp hatchet, while the carpenter set about making new spokes. When we left to go painting, the carpenter was sitting on the floor with a draw knife, shaping a spoke; and the first wheel section was taking form under the blacksmith's hatchet.

About four in the afternoon the picture was finished; and we came back to find that the spokes were fitted into the holes which had been bored in the new sections, and into the hub, which had fortunately been undamaged. The blacksmith was just completing a new rim and, while I watched, they made the final assembly of the wheel, and mounted it on the old wagon.

When they stepped back to survey their handiwork, I felt a sort of awe come over me. If my producing a painting in two days seemed a miracle to them, their fashioning a new wheel from such crude materials and hand tools seemed even more so to me. I told them what I was thinking, and they laughed good-naturedly.

"Every man to his profession," said the carpenter, as he shook hands to leave. As he walked away, I noticed that he carried his shoulders just a little more erect.

"La Huera Pistola will be here presently," informed my host,

"and tomorrow by noon I will have your truck ready to run. I hope that it has not been too disagreeable."

I assured him from the bottom of my heart that I wouldn't have missed meeting him and his fine family for anything.

Questioned about my bill, he named a figure that was considerably below what the job would have cost me at the border, and the bill included my board. If I had been new in the country, there would probably have been an expensive towing job, more money in some dirty border garage, and none of the fun. I was glad that I was beginning to understand the importance of taking things as they come in Mexico.

Just then I heard a soft footstep in the doorway, and turned to see a tall gaunt woman, at least eighty. It was La Huera Pistola. She wore a faded light-blue dress that matched her eyes. Her face was a mass of wrinkles, and had the texture of an old shoe that has lain a long time in the sun and rain. Her black reboza was gathered too close to her head to show anything of the color of her hair, but it must have been white. She smiled, an almost toothless smile, when my friend informed her that her wagon was finished.

We went out into the yard and helped her hitch up. She was friendly and grateful and promised to pay the blacksmith and carpenter with firewood. Her voice was soft and sweet like a young girl's. When she climbed into the old wagon, there was the Colt on her hip. The holster was old and worn, but the gun was well oiled and as shiny as new—the only thing about her that had not been ravaged by time.

## Three Dangerous-looking Characters

A CARAVAN of American tourists had stopped in a little town on the road to Guaymas. They were just getting out to go into the cantina for a cold beer, and were loudly proclaiming the fact to the whole countryside in typical American tourist fashion—making cracks about the town and people, in English, loud enough to be heard a block; forgetting that, in a place so near the border, someone was almost bound to understand them.

Suddenly, one of them turned to the others and cried in a louder voice than usual.

"Gosh! Get a load of that trio! How would you like to meet up with those babies after dark?"

The three characters that had caused the special comment were going into the cantina. One had a wooden leg. He wore a wide sombrero and a long "handlebar" mustache. He did look a bit like a movie version of something out of *Treasure Island*. Another had a twisted foot, a swarthy complexion, and rather ragged clothes. He looked to me like nothing more dangerous than a poor farmer. The third had a patch over his left eye, and a couple of deep scars; but there was nothing about the three that would have made me suspicious of their characters.

I could not help thinking, while the tourists were still commenting loudly about the three "dangerous-looking characters," how much the movies have taught us in the United States to place people in types. A banker must look a certain way, a doctor must have a furrowed brow and a black bag, a musician must have long hair, and of course, a villain has a swarthy complexion and a mustache.

The three went into the cantina, and the tourists followed.

Presently, strains of a lively tune came from inside, punctuated by daunted whoops from the Americans. The three were musicians, and seeing the cars stopped in front of the cantina where they played, they had gone over to go to work. I went inside, and arrived just in time to see one of the Americans get up and shove a silver peso in the shirt pocket of the wooden-legged man, who was playing the "bass fiddle." The chap with the twisted leg was busy with the guitar, and the one-eyed gentleman had a violin. They were really very good, and the Americans were enjoying the huge joke on themselves.

"Listen to those babies play," shouted one. "Boy, would I like to have them at the Elks' convention next month! Wouldn't they be a wow?"

"Yeh," said another, "and to think that you guys thought they was a bunch of crooks, or something. A guy lives and learns down here, don't he? I'm going to tip these bozos a peso apiece, and let's drink up; I'll buy another round."

"We had better get on our way, if we want to get any fish caught," spoke a third.

"Hell, who ever heard of catching fish on a fishing trip?"

"Well, Guaymas is famous for its good fishing."

"Yeh, and for other things too. Come on, boys, shell out some dough for these guys. Do you think they came in here to play for us because they like the looks of our complexions?"

The man with the one eye and the violin grinned. I could see that he understood English. He accepted the tips, however, with a polite nod. That was what he had come in for, and he was obviously conditioned to tourists and their ways. The extra, loud one was passing the hat now.

"Come on, fellows, what the hell! These guys hafta live too."

I could just see him getting up in the Lions' club, and suggesting that the man across the table be fined a dollar for having his badge on crooked.

They finally left, after lining the musicians up in the doorway for a picture, and tipping them again. The chap who had passed the hat was kittenish now, and insisted that he get in the picture

on the next shot. He swapped hats with the bass fiddler, and put one arm around his shoulder.

"What a picture!" shouted the man with the camera. "Damn! Won't the boys back home get a kick out of that? Joe sure is a card."

The four cars were soon on their way again, in a cloud of dust. The man with the wooden leg pretended to find something in his hat, before he put it back on. He made quite a mock ceremony of dusting it out, thoroughly, to the accompaniment of considerable laughter on the part of his fellows and the bartender, who had come to the door. José was quite a card too.

I watched the three, as they made their way down the block to a bench under the trees. There they emptied their pockets, and, placing the money in one pile, started dividing it. The bartender came down too.

"One for the cantina owner," counted José. "One for Ignacio, one for Pablo and one for me—pobrecita! but look over there, compadres. There sits the poor little one, the blind old woman, so much more needful of the dinero than we; and her cup is empty. Que barbaro, these loco Americanos! They give us so much, and nothing to this poor old beggar. I, José, shall give a fourth of my share of this money, so that the fine old Señora can buy bread. After all, she cannot play a bass viol like myself."

"As for me," spoke the man with a twisted foot, "I can easily play the violin and earn more. I shall give her half of my share, when we have made the division."

"I have but one eye," said the guitar player. "I know something of what it is to be blind, since, for a while after my injury, neither eye was of service; I shall give the blind one three-quarters of my share."

They all turned to the bartender inquiringly.

"Compadres! Why bother to make a division? I am willing that the deserving one have all of my share. After all, this is the fishing season in Guaymas; and there will be many more carloads of tourists, equally foolish, with pockets full of money."

"It is agreed," they all chorused.

The procession, crossing the street, might have appeared a bit ludicrous, had I not sat on another bench and listened to the con-







versation. To me, it was a noble spectacle: the fat bartender with the money in his dirty apron, followed by the three musicians. They all stood with their hats in their hands, though they knew the woman could not see, while the bartender said something, which I was not able to catch, and poured the contents of the apron into her lap.

"Come, caballeros," he said, turning away from the stunned old beggar. "I will buy a cold beer."

As I sat there on the bench, watching the old woman, I began thinking of all the things that keep drawing me back to this semi-desert state of Sonora: of the cactus-studded sunsets, the never ending wonder of the plant and animal life, the contrasts from sea to sierra. I thought of all the places I wanted to see: the deep barrancas, where new plants await a collector; street scenes and pastoral landscapes that cry to be painted. A fascinating country—but suddenly I realized that, more than any of these, the greatest thing about the country was the people.

I crossed the street and strolled past the old beggar. She had not moved. Her thin bony hands were gently caressing the money in her lap. She was not counting it; she was just feeling it. Tears were gently rolling down her cheeks, from the sightless eyes, and making little splotches in the dust on her black reboza.

Suddenly there was a blare of music from down the street; another car of tourists had parked, and the musicians were grouped in the doorway, playing their very best. A lady in the tourist car was loudly refusing to get out.

"You can't get me out into this dirty joint," she howled. "Look at that fellow over there. I'm as close to him as I intend to get. Anyone with half an eye can see that the bass fiddle is just a front. If he ever got you into that place, he would cut your throat for two dollars. If you want me to get out of this car, you will have to drive me some place that's civilized."

I looked back at the old beggar. The music seemed to have broken her trance. She wasn't handling the money any more; she was crossing herself, and mumbling with her feeble old lips. I am sure she was saying prayers to her favorite Saint, for the souls of her benefactors.























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